

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS IN CENTRAL TIBET



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Philosophy in Tibetan and Buddhist
Studies**

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Marriage is the institution through which people join their lives in emotional and economic ways by forming a household. It confers rights and obligations with respect to regulating emotional intimacy and love, raising children, holding property and passing on inheritance, maintaining kinship ties and prescribing the household unit's position in and relationship to society.

The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is located on the central part of the Qinghai-Tibet plateau. The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau is the largest and highest plateau in the world, and a large part of it is flanked by mountains that are from 4600 to 4900 meters high. The average altitude of the plateau is 4000 meters, and Tibet is therefore called 'the roof of the world' or 'the third pole of the earth'.¹

Tibet was traditionally divided into three regions: Tö (sTod, 'Upper'), U-Tsang (U-gTsang, 'Central'), Do Kham (mDo Khams, 'Lower'). Today the Upper, the Central and part of the Lower regions are part of the TAR. Most Tibetans, however, live outside TAR, in Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan and Gansu. Thus Tibetan culture and language stretches over a huge area and there are big cultural differences from region to region.

Local customs are of great importance for an ethnic community, and China encompasses more than 56 nationalities. Local customs are connected to the nationalities' history, psychology and character, and understanding local customs is important if you want to do research on nationalities. Tibet was in the past a distinct nation with its own religion, language and customs. People living on the Tibetan Plateau, such as Tibetans, Monpas, Lhopas and Tibetan Muslims, have their own ways of living and their own marriage, burial or other ceremonies. Tibetan local customs exist not only in the Tibet Autonomous Region, but also in the aforementioned provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan. At present many scholars and tourists come to Tibet and want to know more about Tibetan culture.

¹ http://www.tibetinfo.com.cn/dili/menu_dlgk_gk.htm ; accessed on 18 November, 2007

Tibet's 'traditional' culture has changed throughout the ages through contact with neighbouring peoples, and changes have been particularly dramatic during the last half century. Tibet's unique culture is today heavily influenced both by Western and Chinese culture, and today Central Tibet is a multiethnic society, where the main groups are the Tibetans and the Han Chinese. There is also a Muslim community consisting of people of Han Chinese and Kashmiri identity. The Tibetan language has also changed by adopting many words and expressions from Chinese, as well as some from the English language.

Many Tibetans, especially young Tibetans, are easily influenced by other cultures, and along with the various changes of social structure, people's lives and marriage customs are inevitably influenced. It is therefore urgent to study the 'traditional' marriage customs, the rich oral song traditions, the dances, the speeches, the costumes, the rituals and the marriage arrangements – before they possibly disappear altogether.

Despite the hardships of traditional life in Tibet, Tibetans have managed to keep their culture and customs alive, and even today, in a situation with rapid social and economic changes, we still find the old marriage customs continued in Tibet, particularly in the countryside.

1.1. Types of Marriages

Across the Tibetan populated areas we will find some common cultural patterns. Regarding marriage, there are two main types:

1. Monogamy (*bza' tshang* or *khyo gcig shug gcig*)
2. Polygamy (*bza' gsum* or *khyo mang shug gcig* and *shug mang khyo gcig*)

Monogamy

The prevailing marriage form is monogamy.² Counting in terms of family units, 90 % or more of the marriages are monogamous. The newlyweds live with their parents and grandparents, if they are still alive. The custom is generally that the wife moves to the husband's family, and this is called 'patrilocal' or 'virilocal' residence.

Polygamy

Since polygamy still exists in Tibetan communities, it will be briefly described here. Polygamy is when a person is married to more than one person at the same time. This is

² rDo dgon gsang bdag rdo rje and dGa' ba pa sangs, 2003: 100-102.

against the law of the People's Republic of China, but is still practiced in Tibetan societies because such unions were formed before the promulgation of this rule. In recent years polygamy has also increased in certain areas (Fjeld 2007). There are two types of polygamy: polyandry is when there are two or more husbands and one wife, while polygyny is when there are two or more wives and one husband.

Polyandry is an ancient custom in Tibet, and it is still common in the countryside. Polyandry is widely practiced in the western parts of Tibet, in the Shigatse (gZhis kha rtse) area. One form of polygyny, or multi-wife families, is when a man marries his wife's sisters (sororal polygyny). In some of the families, the man marries his step-daughter, but these families are very rare in Tibet. The prevailing form of polyandry is the marriage with the wife's sister (sororal polygyny) or husband's brother (fraternal polyandry). A man's marriage with his wife's sister may happen if the husband is married into the wife's family (*mag pa*) and her younger sister wishes to stay with them; then the husband will cohabit with the younger sister as well. As mentioned earlier, marriage with a step-daughter is also possible, it happens in cases when a man marries a widow with a young daughter. When the step-daughter grows up, the man has the right to cohabit with her as well.³

Fraternal polyandry, the most common form of polygamy in Tibetan areas, is practiced in order to maintain a household and avoid dividing up the property. After the elder brother marries a girl, and the younger brothers grow up, they share the wife. Usually, it is considered to be a good indication of the harmony of the brotherhood for them to marry a single woman. The offspring of the wife will be considered as the offspring of the senior husband. The child will call the main husband 'father' (*pha la*), while the junior husband will be addressed 'uncle' (*a khu*). Sometimes, though very seldom, the husbands are not blood-related. Usually, the wife will have her own bedroom and a sign will be posted outside (e.g. a shoe) when she is available.

Polygamous marriages are common in some areas, particularly in Tsang, but since quite a bit of research has already been carried out on the topic (Goldstein 1971, Penjor 2001 and Fjeld 2007), this will not be the main focus of my thesis. My interest is primarily the wedding ceremony itself, and the wedding songs, and not the type of marriage arrangement. In my thesis, I want to write about the marriage ceremonies that are most typical in Central Tibetan

³ See e.g. Aziz 1978.

villages. As far as I know very few scholars have written about wedding customs in Central Tibet.

Patriarchy

Most Tibetan families, regardless of the marriage form, are patriarchal, meaning that the men usually make the important decisions, but this does not mean that women are without rights in their families. In most of the families, women arrange the revenue and expenditure, they are the mainstay of family life and are busy from morning till night milking cows, making tea, roasting and grinding barley and making butter, curd and clothes. Looking after children is the responsibility of women. In cases where a man moves to his wife's family upon marriage (as *mag pa*), this happens generally when there is no male offspring to bring the family lineage on. In such cases, the wife has high authority in the family and the position of the *mag pa* is generally low, at least in the early years of marriage.

1.2 Sources and Secondary Literature

In Tibetan and Chinese

Several books and a series of articles have been published in Tibetan about Tibetan marriage customs. The Nationality Publishing House in Beijing published an anthology entitled *Bod kyi dmangs srol gces btus* ('The Selected Customs of Tibet') in 1999. In this book, there are three articles about marriage customs in Tibet: one by bSod tshe, *Bod kyi sngar srol gnyen sgrig las long chang skor* ('Tibetan Marriage Customs in Old Times and the Ceremony of Asking for the Beer'), one by Tshe lbang *gTsang khul gyi gnyen sgrig byed srol skor* ('The Marriage Customs in the gTsang Area') and the last one by 'Bri gung rong pa'i nor rgyus, *Bod byang phyogs kyi bag ma gtong len gyi rgyun srol* ('The Custom of Receiving and Sending Brides in Northern Tibet').

Since the first and second articles do not give much new information about marriage customs in Tibet, there is no need to give a broader presentation of these articles. The third article describes how nomadic boys and girls have free contact before marriage and how parents do not interrupt their children's choice of lovers and marriage partners. The article also describes arranged marriages among nomads, the bride dowry and the general ages of the bride and groom. The author also describes the wedding stages: the maternal uncles sending the bride to the groom's home, the songs and speeches that are given and the other recreational activities

that are held during the wedding. The information is, however, of a general nature and not very precise.

bSod nams chos dar's *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol* ('Wedding Customs in Lhasa') published by the Nationality Publishing House in Beijing in 2003, mainly portrays wedding customs in the Lhasa area. It includes the stages of courtship, engagement, roles of the matchmaker and the maternal uncle, and gives a description of the wedding day. The author focuses on banquets, but he also includes descriptions of wedding preparations, such as making the food and receiving gifts from guests. Regarding the banquets, the author describes how the bride is sent to the groom's home, how the bride is received and how songs and speeches are offered during the banquet. The portrayal of the process of the banquet is meticulous and the wedding preparations are described in detail. This book, however, is written like a novel rather than a scholarly book. The author gives several *dramatis personae* in this book, so although the book contains much information about wedding ceremonies, this seems hardly to be formal data and should only be used in this thesis to supplement other information.

P.W. Barshi and Thubten Sangay have compiled abundant information about marriage ceremonies in *gNa' rabs bod kyi chang sa'i lam srol* ('Tibetan Marriage Customs in Old Times'), published by the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, in 1979. This book mainly focuses on traditional wedding customs in Central Tibet and it gives an overview of the Tibetan marriage system, including looking for a daughter-in-law (*mna' ma*), methods and procedures for asking for a girl from the boy's side, the offering of the girl by the girl's family, beer ceremonies, sending and receiving the bride, the content of the wedding ceremony, and finally the sending off of the daughter-in-law after she has stayed half a year in her husband's home (*gnyen phrad*). The book also provides general information about ways of asking for a girl. The compilers include descriptions of marriage customs in western Tibet (sTod phyogs), in the southwest part of Central Tibet (gTsang khul) and the central region of Tibet (dBus khul). Even if information given in this book deals with marriages in 'traditional Tibet', i.e. before 1959, the customs are somewhat the same today in Tibetan villages. Even though the compilers base their information on memories from Tibet, the data seem largely accurate and will be used in my presentation and discussion of marriage customs along with other sources.

One of the main sources in my research on marriage customs in Tibet is Blo bzang Byams dpal's *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol* ('Marriage Customs in Western and Central Tibet'), published in Lhasa by the Tibetan People's Publishing House in 2003. Two sections of the book describe wedding ceremonies, in the Tsang area and in Lhasa, respectively. The contents of the two sections follow the same structure: the author describes the whole marriage procedure in these two localities (Tsang and Lhasa) and introduces the ways in which marriages in Central Tibetan society have traditionally been arranged, from spouse selection to the marriage being mutually agreed to by both sides, and from the prenuptial engagement to the wedding ceremonies.

In Sangngag Dorje Gaba Pasang's *Bod kyi yul srol rnam bshad* ('On Tibetan Local Customs', 2004), there is a short section on marriage in Lhasa, while Tsering Yangdzom, in *Xi zang gui zu shi jia* ('The Aristocratic Families', 2005), describes marriages in the aristocracy in Lhasa.⁴ In addition to this, some marriage songs from Ngari (2000) have been published digitally by Professor Tsering Gyalpo at the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences, Lhasa.⁵

In Western Languages

Several ethnographic studies of customs in Tibet have been carried out by western scholars, and some of these contain collections of Tibetan songs which have been translated into western languages. Giuseppe Tucci ([1949] 1966), has collected and translated folk songs from Gyantse (rGyal rtse) and western Tibet, and among the songs in his collection there are several marriage songs. Studies of marriage rituals and songs have also been published in French and German, including an article in German on eastern Tibetan festival traditions by Dieter Schuh (1973), an article in French by Katia Buffetrille on a marriage ritual written for the wedding of the prince of Derge (sDe dge) in 1970 by Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas (1987), and a book in German about festival traditions in Ladakh by Martin Brauen (1989). Unfortunately, since English is the only western language I can read, I do not have access to the contents of these works. Loten Dorje, presently an M.Phil. student at the University of Oslo, published a digital book in English in 2007, in collaboration with Kevin Stuart, on marriage customs and songs in Qinghai entitled *Life and Marriage in sKya rgya Tibetan*

⁴ Tsering Yangdzom's book has been translated into English.

⁵ The video recording of a wedding song from Zhide in Purang has been published as part of the folk music collection at the THDL site (<http://www.thdl.org/collections/music/folkmusic.html>; accessed on 03 June 2006).

Village: sKya rgya sa khul du dar ba'i gnyen ston gyi cho ga dang yul mi'i 'tsho ba. Since marriage customs in Qinghai lie outside the scope of my investigation, this book, and its numerous translated marriage songs, will only be used for comparative purposes, and particularly for information on nomadic marriage traditions.

Anthropological studies of marriage customs and marriage types in Tibet and the Himalayas are also available and they include studies by scholars like Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark (1963), Barbara Aziz (1978), Melvyn Goldstein (1971), Nancy Levine (1988), Ben Jiao (2001) and Heidi Fjeld (2007). Several of the anthropological works are concerned with social structure and polyandry and do not focus on marriage songs. These studies are therefore consulted for context and for background information for understanding marriage rituals and marriage songs.

In addition to the primary sources on marriage songs and speeches in Tibetan already published, I gathered some complementary information on marriage songs and rituals during a field visit in June 2006 to Lhasa and to Tagtse (sTag rtse) County, east of Lhasa. The interview data will be used in this thesis to support or contrast the information provided by the textual sources.

To sum up, I mainly base the information of my thesis on the three Tibetan textual sources mentioned above: bSod nams chos dar's *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol* ('Wedding Customs in Lhasa'), P.W. Barshi and Thubten Sangay's *gNa' rabs bod kyi chang sa'i lam srol* ('Tibetan Marriage Customs in Old Times') and Blo bzang Byams dpal's *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol* ('Marriage Customs in Western and Central Tibet'). I will give a description of a typical marriage procedure in Central Tibet, but my main focus will be on the marriage songs and speeches, which I translate and annotate. In the introduction to each song, I will provide information about the context for when the song or speech is given, then I give the song or speech in transliteration (Wylie), followed by a translation. Since only a few marriage songs from Central Tibet have been translated into English, the main body of my thesis will be the translation of the songs. Wedding rituals and customs cannot be properly understood until we analyse the song and speech traditions that constitute an important part of all traditional Tibetan weddings.

1.3 Theory and Method

Since the primary data on which this thesis is based are oral texts in the Tibetan language, the ability to read, understand and translate the songs and speeches are basic skills that are necessary to write this thesis. In order to fully understand the songs I am translating, I interviewed, during my field work in Takse and Lhasa during the summer months of 2006, a number of old Tibetans about the meaning of the songs. In some of the speeches and the songs there are metaphors and expressions hard to understand for a young man like me, and I have greatly benefited from the information from old Tibetans. Furthermore, the reading of secondary material published by Tibetan, Chinese and Western scholars has provided the necessary context for my understanding of the songs. Translating songs and speeches requires an intimate knowledge of the culture that produced them, and in my work with these songs I have continuously moved from text to context and back to text again in an ongoing hermeneutical process.

Chapter 2. The Genre of Marriage Songs

Tibetan culture is spread over huge areas ranging from North India and Pakistan in the West to the Chinese provinces of Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan in the East, and far into the Himalayas of India, Nepal and Bhutan in the South. This stretching over such a vast geographical area, inhabited by many ethnic groups, results in special musical styles, and thus we find great variation both in terms of the content of marriage songs and their melodies. In the past, Tibetan music was little known by the outside world. There exists a large number of secular songs in Tibet, and apart from the few studies mentioned above, no substantial works have been published.

Within the wide category of folk songs (*dmangs gzhas*) we have different types of songs, such as wedding songs (*khruṅ glu gzhas chen*), work songs (*las zhas*) and drinking songs (*chang gzhas*). Sometimes folk songs are sung as questions and answers between men and women, and these are simply called ‘questions and answers’ (*gab tshig*); this way of singing is very old in Tibet. Then there are religious songs (*mgur*), sometimes sung as narratives (*rnam thar*), like e.g. the narrative songs about Nangsa Obum (sNang sa ‘od ‘bum) or the hundred thousand songs of Milarepa (Mi la ras pa). Traditional society also had classical songs (*nang ma*) which were sung at the festive occasions arranged by aristocrats, but which today are popular songs. Among the traditional classical songs were the so-called fast songs (*‘khrug gzhas*), and in certain areas of Tibet we also have a kind of throat singing (*la gzhas*), particularly in eastern Tibet.

The songs I shall discuss here are ‘wedding songs’ (*khruṅ glu gzhas chen*), which are different from ‘ceremonial songs’ or ‘great songs’ (*gzhas chen*). Some people, who have no deep knowledge of Tibetan folk art, think that ceremonial songs (*gzhas chen*) and wedding songs (*khruṅ glu gzhas chen*) are the same, yet they are different. According to Chudrang Wangchug (mChu sbrang dbang phyug, 1993), there is a tremendous difference between these two types of songs. Firstly, the meaning of the content, the means of expression and the musical characteristics are different. Secondly, ceremonial songs (*gzhas chen*) are sung on many festive occasions, often accompanied with dances, and were historically associated with performances by the aristocracy. For instance, we can learn from Sakya Sonam Gyaltan’s

rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long, published in 1388, that ceremonial songs (*gzhas chen*) were performed at the great celebration of King Songtsen Gampo's (Srong btsan sgam po, d. 649/50) successful promulgation of laws.⁶ The following example explains that ceremonial songs already existed as early as in the seventh century, during the time of King Songtsen Gampo:

*yid 'ong mdzes ma bu mo gcu drug gis,
mdzes pa'i rgyan bcas me tog thogs nas ni
glu dang gar gyi rna ba'i dga' ston 'gyed'*⁷

Sixteen attractive and beautiful girls
With gorgeous jewellery, holding flowers
Celebrate the wedding by singing and dancing

In addition, during the Dalai Lamas' and Panchen Lamas' reincarnation ceremonies, ceremonial songs were also performed.⁸

But the special category of wedding songs (*khruṅ glu gzhas chen*) are used during wedding ceremonies only, and the musical characteristics of the songs are inseparable parts of the Tibetan wedding ceremony. These marriage songs have absorbed different types of traditional Tibetan songs; therefore, they have many different styles. In Tibetan, *khruṅ* is an honorific term for 'alcoholic drink', while *glu* means 'song', as the name suggests; *khruṅ glu* is thus a song for festive occasions where alcohol is consumed and came to be the term for 'wedding ceremony song'.

Wedding songs and speeches are extremely important in Tibet during wedding ceremonies. The *khruṅ glu gzhas chen* belong to a small group of songs that have become very popular in Central Tibet. They are mostly performed in the homes of the bride and groom and were performed during all phases of the nuptial ceremonies at weddings in Tibet in the past, but also to a large extent today. Both men and women dress in traditional Tibetan *chuba* (*pyu ba*), and women wear splendid jewellery as well. Sometimes they invite or hire specialist singers.

⁶ The *Lha chos dge ba bcu* ('Code of Ten Virtuous Deeds') and *Mi spyod gtsang ma bcu drug* ('The Sixteen Immaculate Behaviours').

⁷ See e.g. *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, Beijing Nationality Publishing House, 1981: 77.

⁸ *mChu sbrang dbang phyug*, 1993: 26 (vol. 1).

The performance is highly structured with many sections, from the engagement to the wedding day, and to the day when the bride or groom visits his or her natal family for the first time after getting married (*gnyen log*). The songs contain many allusions to old Tibetan customs and beliefs, to nature and animals, to both pre-Buddhist and Buddhist beliefs and practices in Tibet. There are also references to neighbouring countries, particularly to India and China; India is the country from where Buddhism came to Tibet, while China has beautiful commodities like silk and porcelain.

The songs are sung partly by the party of the bride, partly by that of the bridegroom and partly by both. The songs consist chiefly of a series of blessings (*sbyin rlabs*), for example (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 82):

bkra shis lung pa'i phu la
gangs la nyi ma shar byung
thugs sems gangs las dkar ba
gnang su chog ga yod do

*bkra shis lung po'i phu la*⁹
shing bzang yal ga rgyas song
thugs sems yal ga rgyas rgyas
gnang su chog ga yod do

bkra shis lung po'i mda' la
mtsho la dar kha chags song
thugs sems dar kha chags chags
gnang su chog ga yod do

In the upper part of the auspicious valley
The sun is shining on the snowy [mountains]
It could be said that
Your heart is whiter [e.g. more pure] than the snow

⁹ There's probably a mistake in the text here – the usual sequence is upper, middle and lower, and here 'upper' is repeated twice.

In the middle part of the auspicious valley
Good trees thrive with flourishing branches
It could be said that
Your heart thrives like the flourishing branches

In the lower part of the auspicious valley
The lake was frozen
It could be said that
Your mind is as calm as the frozen lake.

Marriage songs also contain praise, for instance this song (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 99):

shing bzang ya la gzigs dang
tsan dan sdong po'i rgyud red
lo tog ya la gzigs dang
gro nas sran ma'i rgyud red
mi bzang ya la gzigs dang
ge sar rgyal po'i rgyud red

Please look at the healthy tree
Which descends from the sandalwood tree
Please pay attention to the crop
Types of wheat, barley and peas
Please look at the generous person
Who descends from King Gesar

The praise is not meant only for the bride and the bridegroom, but also for the parents, the beer maiden (*a ma chang ma*), the house and the various objects and victuals used during the marriage ceremony, as exemplified by the following song (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 76):

gzhi 'di rgyal po'i pho brang

zur lcog¹⁰ nyi shu stsa lnga
phyong gzhi ga nas bltas kyang
bkra shis rtags brgyad tshang bzhag

The foundation is like that of the king's palace
With a balcony at each of the twenty-five corners
From whichever of the four directions one looks
All the eight auspicious signs are there

As is the case with the common Tibetan folk song, the stanzas of the marriage songs (*kh rung glu g zhas chen*) consist of four six-syllable lines. The text of a song sung by the beer maiden (*kh rung zhu ma*) in the living room during the ceremony will serve as an example (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 78):

ma 'gyur gtan du bzhugs dang
dbus kyi ri rgyal lhun po
nyi ma zla ba'i skor phyogs
ma nor pa la zhus yod

Mt. Sumeru,¹¹ in the centre of the universe
Please stand stably there forever
The sun and the moon did not make mistakes
In circumambulating [the mountain]

After the songs, dances (with singing) follow as accompaniment, for example this song (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 26):

ri bo g.yas ri g.yon ri
phar shig tshur shig gnang dang
bdag gi mtshad ldan bla ma'i

¹⁰ *Zur lcog* is a small room built on the roof of the main house.

¹¹ *Ri* means 'mountain', *rgyal po* 'king' and *lhun po* 'heap'. The mountain *Ti se* is generally called *Ri rgyal po* 'the King of Mountains', it is also called *Ri rgyal lhun po*. In most Tibetan works *Ri rab* or *Sumeru* is mentioned as *Ri'i rgyal po* (Das [1902] 1983: 1172). *Bkra shis lhun po* ('Heaps of Merit') is the famous monastery of the Panchen Lama in Shigatse.

chibs chen phebs dgos yod do
chibs chen phebs pa'i zhabs rjes
pad ma'i thang nas gsal byung

The mountains on both the right and the left sides
Please [make a space] on each side
The great horse of my perfect lama
Should come
The footprints of the great riding horse
Were clearly imprinted on the lotus plain.

A dance always comes after any kind of song; it also plays a large part in other ceremonies, both lay and religious ones. Since the early days of Buddhism in Tibet, religious dance, *Gar* and '*Cham*', have been described in the scriptures. These religious types of dances, which are complex and have esoteric meaning, are performed by monks in the monasteries. One example of religious dance were those performed at the end of the year by the monks as a ritual offering for the prosperity of all sentient beings. Compared with religious dances, the Tibetan folk dances are diverse and can be performed at any time and at events such as festivals, weddings and gatherings.

Dancing together and singing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 99):

ge sar rgyal po bzhin gyi
phyag mdas ma khog byas byung
rkyang rgod g.yer pa bzhin gyi
srab mdas ma khog byas byung
a ma chang ma bzhin gyi
ja khras mi gyong byas byung

Like King Gesar's arrow¹²
Nothing can stop it [from flying]
Like the intelligent wild ass

¹² *Phyag mdas* is the honorific term for 'shot'.

It cannot be controlled by reins.
Like the beer maiden's (*a ma chang ma*)
Beer pot, it cannot be emptied

The same tune is repeated again and again with different verses, or it is sung in completely different tunes and verses are used in reply. The verses often have allusive or indirect meaning, with frequent use of metaphor, for example (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, pp. 79-80):

o los rgya yi gzhung du

nor bu len du phyin yod
rgya yi rgya nag rgyal pos
nor bu gsol ras gnang byung
nor bu'i phebs lam yin zer
rgya nag dar las 'jam pa
nor bu bzhugs sa yin zer
'ja' yi gur khang phebs bzhag

I, the boy, went to China
To pick up the jewel¹³
The king of the Chinese empire
Generously granted me the jewel
Being the path of the jewel
It was softer than the Chinese silk
As for the dwelling place¹⁴ of the jewel
A rainbow-coloured tent was pitched.

This song is sung by the maternal uncle (*zhang chen*) of the groom when he goes to the bride's home to escort the bride to the wedding, after the bride's family has approved of it. The way to the groom's family is smooth and comfortable, and a commodious and bright house has been prepared for the bride.

¹³ *Nor bu* ('jewel') is a metaphor for the bride.

¹⁴ *bZhugs sa* has several meanings, it can be a 'seat' or 'house', in this case, probably 'tent'.

Sometimes in the text of some songs, the locality's dialect appears, for example in the line *o los rgya yi gzhung du*, meaning 'the *o lo* went to China'. Here *o lo* means 'boy' in the Shigatse dialect, whereas 'boy' is *bu* in standard Tibetan.

In some songs, the basic text is extended by refrain phrases, with or without lexical meaning, for example (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 74):

*g.yag gu rog po sga cha*¹⁵ *rog rog*¹⁶
byang tsha len par sga cha rog rog
mi nyag mtshal mo gom 'gros shig shig
rgya ja len par gom 'gros shig shig
gzhon pa nga tsho dpung gdang shig shig
nor bu len par dpung gdang shig shig

Black yaks with similar black saddles keeping step
While transporting salt from the north, black saddles are harmonious.
Mules (*mtshal mo*)¹⁷ from Minyak¹⁸ are moving side by side
While transporting Chinese tea, they are moving side by side
We, the young men, are going shoulder to shoulder
While inviting the jewel, we are standing shoulder to shoulder

Some of the songs are broken up by meaningless 'filler syllables', like *a le*, *la ni* and *ya la ni*. These syllables and filler words are usually not included when the songs are put into writing, but when the singer sings marriage songs (*kh rung glu*), they will be sung as embellishment. There are also refrain phrases or 'filler syllables' before, between and after lines of the text. These filler syllables and refrains are typical of Tibetan folk songs, wedding songs and western Tibetan songs.

¹⁵ Paraphernalia that go with saddles.

¹⁶ *Rog rog* means 'dark/black figures (usu. seen at a distance)', Goldstein 2001: 1048.

¹⁷ A slightly reddish-coloured mule.

¹⁸ *Mi nyag* is the name of a region in Kham (Lower Tibet).

Chapter 3. Tibetan Marriage and Divorce

3.1 Spouse Selection

Although practices vary from one culture to another, all societies have rules regulating the process of selecting a spouse, who is eligible to marry whom, which individuals are forbidden to marry one another and so forth. In Tibetan society, there are many limitations concerning whom one might choose as a spouse. Some of these limitations have disappeared in modern society and some can still be found, more so in the countryside than in the city. The marriage taboos in Tibetan societies differ from area to area, but common to most localities is that one cannot marry anyone related by blood. On the paternal side, this is a prohibition that counts for seven generations and on the maternal side for five generations. In parts of the Shigatse area, this prohibition includes all generations of descendants on the paternal side and seven generations on the maternal side. Therefore, in Tibetan society, there are very few cross-cousin marriages, while this is a common form of marriage among other nationalities in China.

Generally, there are two types of cross-cousin marriage in China: a male marries his mother's brother's daughter, or a female marries her mother's brother's son.¹⁹ Traditionally, the Chinese believed that these arrangements would promote family harmony, and preference for these practices were common and accepted by Chinese communities. After 1949, however, through the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, no marriage may be contracted if the man and woman are lineal relatives by blood, or collateral relatives by blood up to the third degree of kinship.²⁰

In traditional Tibet, if the marriage prohibition was broken, the spouses were respectively called 'polluted man' (*dme bo*) and 'polluted woman',²¹ (*dme mo*).²² People say that in the old days, the punishment for a couple breaking this taboo in Central Tibet was execution (*ko btums brgyab pa*); the couple was sewn inside an animal skin and thrown into a river, or the couple was banished (*gnas dbyung gtong ba*). In the Kyirong (sKyid rong) County in Shigatse there is a stupa between the county administration centre (rdzong) and the Kyi (skyid) village

¹⁹ Hsu 1945.

²⁰ Engel 1984:958.

²¹ A *dme po* or a *dme mo* is respectively a man or woman who has committed incest or killed relatives.

²² *dme* means 'pollution'.

called Mingring Khar (Ming sring mkhar).²³ People say that in the old days a brother and sister who fell in love with each other were buried alive under the stupa.²⁴

In Tibetan societies marriage is also forbidden between people from ‘commoner families’ (*skye sa gtsang ma*) and ‘low class families’ (*skye sa mi gtsang ba*). Low class families are defined by their occupation, and the lowest categories are the blacksmiths (*mgar ba*), the butchers (*bshan pa*) and the corpse carriers (*rtogs ldan*). In some places also fishermen (*nye pa*), carpenters (*shing bzo ba*) and potters (*rdza bzo ba*) were regarded as low class. There is endogamy or in-marriage within these categories of people. If people from a commoner family marry a low class spouse, their descendants will also be regarded as low class and discriminated by others. Commoners do not share a drinking vessel with a low class person, and they do not marry them. In some places low class people are not invited to celebrations and ceremonies.

There is the idea in Tibetan culture that there is some kind of pollution (*btsog pa*) connected with people belonging to these categories, a notion that is connected with their bones (*rus*). Tibetans think the paternal lineage is connected with their bones (*rus*), and that the maternal line of descent is connected with their flesh (*sha*); Tibetans believe the paternal lineage is the most important.

In some cases, we could find some commoner families’ girls married to low class families, but according to Tibetan tradition if a girl marries down, it does not matter as much as if a boy marries below his status.²⁵ On the contrary, it is very hard to find a bridegroom if does have no boy in the low class family.

3.2 Astrological Calculations

Matching the horoscopes of potential partners is called *bag rtsis*²⁶, and astrology plays an important role in Tibetan communities when people select a spouse. The astrologer will look

²³ *Ming sring* means ‘brothers and sister’, *mkhar* means ‘castle’ or ‘fort’.

²⁴ rGyang 'khor tse phun 2005

²⁵ There are proverbs saying that it does not matter so much if the ‘flesh’ (*sha*) is scattered (i.e. the female side), but the ‘bone’ (*rus*, i.e. the male side) should not be scattered (*rus gyar ba ma yin, sha tig ga gcig gyar bar skyon med*).

²⁶ Astrological calculations used in connection with marriage.

for marriage compatibility and will tell the family whether a marriage is recommendable, whether there are any signs of astrological conflict and so on. If the astrologer finds out that the marriage will bring bad luck to a young couple, he will suggest that the families cancel the engagement or find a kind of compensation called *tor chos* in Tibetan, e.g. the families are told to engage monks to read specific texts or prayers in their homes.

3.3 Arranged Marriages

Historically, the parents' decision was quite important in Tibet, especially in aristocratic families, so Tibet practised what is termed 'arranged marriages'. Marriage was not a simple affair between two young people, but related to the interest of two families. Marriage gave benefits and social status. Through their children's marriages, aristocratic families could enhance their wealth and political position. Nowadays, the custom has gradually changed and more young people make their own decisions about their marriage, especially in urban areas like Lhasa. But even today many marriages in both urban and rural areas are arranged by the families, but often the young boys' or girls' wishes are taken into consideration by the parents. Compared with rural areas, the urban areas have a lower percentage of marriages decided by parents.

Nowadays, a young man and woman have more freedom in their choice of marriage partner. The young couple might consult with their parents, but make the final decision themselves. In urban areas youth have more opportunities to get to know each other in their 'work units' or in social arenas. In rural areas, young people get to know each other when herding livestock, while performing a pilgrimage or during festivals. For example, in eastern Tibet, there is one big festival called Drugpe Lhatse (Drug pa'i lha rtse) or 'The Sixth [Lunar Month] Deities Festival'. This is an annual event, and often people find their spouse during this festival. At that time, young villagers wear their most valuable clothing and ornaments and exhibit themselves in the hope of finding a mate.

The young boys and girls sing love songs to each other. Usually a boy first sings love songs to the girl whom he is attracted to. If they are both attracted to each other, they will sleep together in their own tents or somewhere outside. If they fall in love, the boy might ask her to

be his wife.²⁷ In some areas, if a couple falls in love, the man will visit his lover's house at night without her parents' permission. The young man will take a piece of fat meat, and when he arrives in front of the girl's house, he will throw the meat to the dog so that it won't warn people of his arrival. Then he will go into the girl's house. Before dawn, the man will leave. If the two are still attracted to each other, the boy's family will send a matchmaker to the girl's family to ask for an agreement to the marriage.

Sex before marriage is not prohibited in rural areas. Especially in nomadic areas, the sexual relations between young people are quite open, and children born outside wedlock are not discriminated against. The bride will bring her illegitimate child to the groom's home and the child will have the same position in both the paternal and the maternal extended family.

Nowadays, the young generation have high demands on marriage quality, and they are very concerned to find a good mate. They make their choice of a spouse based on love and on their partner's health condition, sense of responsibility, education, occupation, income and so on. They do not really consider family background like their parents do. Yet in most of the countryside, spouse selection is still practised in the traditional way.

3.4 Divorce

Divorce has become increasingly common in Tibetan society; it is a reflection of societal change. When social conditions change, people's conception of marriage change as well.

According to statistics from the Department of Preventive Medicine at Tibet University Medical College,²⁸ the divorce rates differ much between rural and urban areas. As the sample for this survey collected in 2007, 567 people were interviewed in five towns and in two xiangs in Gongga County. Among the interviewees, 91 % (516) were Tibetans, 8.3 % (47) were Han Chinese, and 0.4 % (2) were Hui (Chinese Muslims). 72.5 % (411) of the interviewees were farmers and nomads, while 27.5 % (156) were engaged in business and services. Among the informants aged 20-60, the married couples constituted 74.4 % (422),

²⁷ See Tshe dbang rDo rje, Anton-Luca and Stuart 2006.

²⁸ In 2007, some teachers conducted a field survey at Gongga County ('Survey of the Health Situation in Gongga County'). This project covered health and environment in the rural area. The project also collected data on family structure, and I received permission to use some of data from their project; these statistics are not yet published.

and only 1.1 % (6) were divorced. The low divorce rate shows that marriage relations are very stable in this rural area.

According to other statistics from Lhasa Chengguan District Civil Affairs Office,²⁹ the long-term divorce pattern is as follows:

Date	Registration of marriage (couple)	Divorce	The rate of divorce per marriage (%)
1980	1202	98	8.2 %
1985	968	73	7.5 %
1990	900	103	11.4 %
1995	1067	193	18.9 %
2000	1052	221	21.0 %
2001	1152	244	21.2 %

The data in the table above confirm that the percentage of divorce in Lhasa has increased from 1980 (8.2 %) to 2001 (21.2 %).

Generally, in Tibetan society the urban marriages are not as stable as rural marriages, and the reasons might be:

- (1) *Higher geographical mobility*. There is a higher mobile population in urban areas than what we find in rural areas. High mobility might be one reason why a large number of couples separate.
- (2) *Unemployment*. In the city there are high numbers of part-time and unemployed people, people who do not have stable occupations and fixed incomes. This instability might cause family problems resulting in divorce.
- (3) *Extra-marital affairs* appear to happen more often in the city. In the city modern life has brought about many changes; many people have moved here from the countryside, and social control is not present in the city to the same degree. People live more individualistic lives and make their own decisions.
- (4) *People demand high quality of marriage life*. City dwellers have a range of choices not found in the village, and nowadays young people demand that their partners are

²⁹ Yangzom: 'Analysis and Discussion of Divorce Rate Increasing in Lhasa City'. China Tibet Information Center, 2002.

educated and that they have a good job and a reasonable salary. If these conditions are not met, people might divorce.

(5) *New divorce laws* make divorces easier to obtain.

(6) *Alcoholism* is much more widespread in the city, and incidents of violence happen quite often in city families due to alcoholism. It is easier for a woman to leave a violent husband in the city than it is in countryside.

Generally, we can say that divorce rates of the younger generation are much higher than that of the older generation. Historically, urban areas have had a relatively higher rate of divorce compared with rural areas, but the percentage of divorce in rural area is gradually increasing as well.

Chapter 4. The Stages of the Marriage

4.1 Engagement

After a period of choosing a spouse and matching the horoscopes of potential partners, and the choice of a boy or a girl is ascertained, the first order of business is the ‘beer-asking’ (*slong chang*), which is a kind of prenuptial engagement. During this phase the family who initiates the proposal will invite the matchmaker and send him to the chosen family to propose.

Generally, the proposing family is the boy’s side, and the boy’s family goes to ask a girl’s family to ask for her as a bride. But in Tibetan society, the proposing family could also be the girl’s family, and in that case the groom (*mag pa*) will reside in the girl’s household, matrilocally. This might happen in aristocratic families if there is no male heir, but it also happens among farmers and semi-nomads in Shigatse and Lhoka.³⁰ In the following I will write as if the boy’s family is the proposing family.

The Matchmaker

The chosen matchmaker will be an elderly man who is esteemed in the village, or the father of the boy or the girl, a maternal uncle, a close friend or a village leader. A prerequisite is that the matchmaker has an eloquent tongue. Nowadays, professional matchmakers have disappeared in urban areas like Lhasa, but the tradition is kept active in rural areas. Because of the low population density of villages and the large distance between such villages, the matchmakers play a vital role in rural areas.

The Beer-Asking Day

The engagement day is carefully chosen and needs to be auspicious according to the Tibetan calendar. Even if the parents of the potential bride or groom are already satisfied with the arrangement, they may pretend to hesitate, and generally the agreement will not be obtained at the first request. Usually, the proposal needs to be repeated on three occasions at least.

Thereafter, both sides of parents will fix an auspicious date for holding the engagement or the ‘beer-asking’ (*slong chang*) ceremony. Ideally, a long period of time would be convenient for

³⁰ See Goldstein and Beall 1990: 50, 52, 104, 154.

the preparations, but in order to prevent any change of decision by either family, the betrothal date is fixed within fifteen to twenty days and not later than a month after the 'beer-asking'.

The engagement presents offered at the beer-asking ceremony include a butter bag (*mar ltang*),³¹ a box of tea (*ja sgam*)³², rice, barley, wheat and mutton. Besides these presents, good clothing and cloth material will be given by the boy's family. The quality of the presents depends on how wealthy the boy's or girl's family is. Generally, a rich family give gifts such as brocade, silk or woollen cloth, and a poor family give average clothing and cloth material. Around 1940-1950 in Lhasa, there were many rich families offering presents valued at more than a hundred *tram rdo*.³³ The mother of the bride-to-be receives special presents such as cash, traditionally called 'milking money' (*nu rin*), and an apron (*pang gdan*) as a token of sincere thanks for bringing up the girl in question.

A white cloth package of money, labelled *nyin 'khyongs spro dod dnyul rdo tshad*, is offered by the boy's family to cover the expenses of the engagement ceremony, specifying the amount enclosed.³⁴ Usually, the boy's family has to arrange the engagement party's banquet, but if the boy's family lives far away, the girl's family do all the shopping and make all arrangements for the engagement party. The expenses will be offered in that white cloth package by the boy's family.

At the engagement day, the matchmaker, with four or five companions, wear their best clothes and even decorate their horses, and go to the girl's family and request for her hand in marriage. When they reach the girl's home, the matchmaker presents a ceremonial scarf (*kha btags*) to all the members of her family, offering them three toasts of barley beer (*chang*) at the gate. If they are pleased with the engagement, the family will drink the barley beer and accept the ceremonial scarves. The head of the girl's family will offer a ceremonial scarf in exchange with sincere respect. Then all of them will be invited to the living room.

³¹ A *mar ltang* is a 'skin bag into which butter has been tightly sewn'.

³² A *ja sgam* is a 'bamboo box containing several bricks of tea'.

³³ rDo dgon gsang bdag rdo rje and dGa' ba pa sangs, 2004: 88. A *tram rdo* is unit in the traditional Tibetan currency which equals fifty *srang*.

³⁴ sPang rgyan me tog 1999. 217.

In the Ne'u na village, located in eastern Tibet near the Yellow River, the guests are invited to the kitchen, because there is a big adobe bed in the kitchen, which is warm and comfortable.³⁵ Many courses will be served to the matchmaker and his companions, including *gro ma 'bras sil* (sweetened rice with raisins, melted butter and wild sweet potato),³⁶ one of most important ceremonial foods in Tibet. Also dishes made from the heads, hearts, lungs and livers of yak, pig and sheep are indispensable. Barley beer, butter tea, milk tea and cheese and yogurt from yaks and sheep are also served. In the urban areas a lot of fruit, like apples, pears, peaches and grapes, is also served.

Traditionally, in Thangkar (Thang dkar) village of Tagtse (sTag rtse) County,³⁷ the matchmaker would say something fastidious in order to create difficulties for the girl's family members. He is showing off as the spokesman of the proposing family (the boy's family), and he is therefore the most honourable guest. He would say things like: 'Why is the meat so cold? Why is the tea too hot? Why don't you serve fruit on the table first?' And he would go on like this, in order to establish his authority as the most important guest.

Usually in Central Tibet, neither the groom nor bride-to-be should appear at the party. After the engagement, the boy can, if he wants to see his bride-to-be, find several opportunities to see the girl secretly, such as during a pilgrimage, in the market or during a picnic. In most of the Shigatse area, during the engagement ceremony, the girl's side does not let the girl know about her engagement and the ceremony. Sometimes she is sent to another village or a relative's house in order to keep her away. This means that the bride is completely ignorant of her departure to the home of the husband-to-be for the wedding ceremony.

In 2001, I spent over three months in Panam (Pa snam) County³⁸ participating in a government project, and I attended this kind of traditional wedding ceremony. I remember that the girl was sent by her parents to visit a relative in another village, and when she returned, she was told the real purpose of her being there. When she got to know the real purpose, she struggled, cried and shouted, but her parents and relatives forced her to put on the ready made wedding clothes and the turquoise jewelled headgear. All her family members

³⁵ Tshe dbang rDo rje, Anton-Luca, Stuart, 2006: 34.

³⁶ *Gro ma 'bras sil* is ceremonial food, offered at such occasions as wedding ceremonies and during Lo gsar (the Tibetan New Year).

³⁷ Tagtse County is approximate 30 km from Lhasa.

³⁸ One of Shigatse's counties.

tried their best to persuade her. Eventually she accepted her destiny and was brought to the wedding ceremony. On the engagement day, both sides of parents will fix an auspicious date for holding the wedding ceremony, and the budget and the guest list will be stipulated on a piece of paper.

The Wedding Contract

Historically, in this ceremony, both families make a wedding contract known as *gnyen yig* or *gnyen gan*. Both sides of parents will sign the contract and two or three relatives on both sides will be witnesses. After the contract is signed, they will pass a copy of the document to both sides. The contract says that after the marriage both the boy and girl need to live harmoniously, and if the new couple have disputes, both parents are responsible to exhort the boy and the girl to find a peaceful solution.

4.2 The Wedding Ceremony

According to tradition, an astrologer will choose a date for the wedding day according to the Tibetan calendar. In rural areas, the wedding day is usually set during the autumn and winter times, because villagers have more leisure time after the harvest, and then the weather is also cold enough for the food to be kept unsalted for a period of time. In urban areas, on the other hand, most people, following the astrologer's decision, pick a date that is convenient for their family and friends. They also need to book a location,³⁹ and people make sure the wedding day does not coincide with any other important dates, like Labour Day, the Tibetan Yogurt Festival (Zho ston, celebrated in the Seventh Tibetan Month), the Tibetan New Year and so on, because during these festivals people are busy with picnics, visiting relatives and making pilgrimages and will not be able to attend wedding ceremonies. Choosing the season with the best weather is also considered.

³⁹ Nowadays, there are many wedding locations that people can choose in urban areas (like Lhasa and Shigatse); these range from event centres to hotels and picnic places. The rental fee for venues varies from around 1500 to 2000 to over 2000 CNY per day. The cost of the rental includes equipment such as tables, chairs, utensils, mahjong and so on. In rural areas, the wedding ceremonies are held in people's homes. If there is not enough space to hold a ceremony in their homes, the neighbours and relatives will offer their home as a wedding location.

4.3 Wedding Preparations

Preparing for a wedding ceremony often takes several days. First of all, both the boy's and the girl's families should carefully choose the dates for the so-called welcoming team and the escorting team, and they should hire several beer maidens and waiters. The welcoming team usually consists of three people, the 'ceremonial leader' (*khri chen*)⁴⁰, the 'ceremonial servant' (*khri g.yog*) and the 'horseman' (*rta pa*); these three people in the team come from the boy's side. The escorting team also consists of three persons: the mother's senior brother (*zhang chen*),⁴¹ his servant (*zhang g.yog*) and a 'bride servant' (*bag g.yog*). Both the ceremonial leader and the maternal uncle must be skilled speakers. The beer girls (*khruṅg zhu ma*) should be good singers of Tibetan folk songs and should be able to elegantly serve beer at the ceremony.

In addition to a person responsible for the whole ceremony, a 'viceroy' (*spyi khyab pa*) is carefully chosen. Then there will be two or three managers (*gnyer pa*), who are responsible for paying the cost, bringing all the implements and food and recording the gifts on a list (*'bul tho rgyag mkhan*). Two or three persons (*dkar rtsis pa*) will be in charge of the cups and dishes during the wedding, and two or three women (*chang ma*) will be responsible for serving the barley beer and regular beer. There will also be a chef (*ma byan*) and several of his assistants.

When the day of the marriage is coming close, the boy's side sends a set of high quality jewellery, such as bracelets (*lag gdub*), rings (*sor gdub*), turquoises (*bla g.yu*), earrings (*rna rgyan*) and a headdress (*spa phrug*), to the girl for her to wear on the eve of the wedding. The girl's family will choose an auspicious day to send the dowry to the boy's family. The dowry includes clothing, quilts, food grains and so on. In some areas, the dowry is sent at the time when the bride leaves her home. Historically, aristocratic families provided very costly dowries. According to the biography of Jamyang Sakya (*Princess in the Land of Snows*, 1990), her dowry included a jewellery-style charm box, and a four-inch-square neckpiece of solid gold inlaid with turquoise and other semiprecious stones.

⁴⁰ 'The ceremonial master' (*khri chen*) comes from the boy's side, and he could be the mother's senior brother or a man who is honoured in the village. In some areas the *khri chen* was called *zhang chen* as well, in order to avoid confusion between the *zhang chen* from the girl's side and the *zhang chen* from the boy's side. In my paper, I am going to use *khri chen* for the uncle from the boy's side.

⁴¹ According to tradition, only the maternal uncle of the girl or boy has the right to be *zhang chen*. If there is no suitable maternal uncle, a man who has the most honour in the village can be chosen as *zhang chen*.

The day before the wedding, the girl has to go through a hair-washing ritual, and the braids are split into two groups, each on one side, and the ends are tied with two coloured velvet threads. According to the traditional custom, one young woman was selected to wash the girl's hair before her wedding, and this woman's animal year (according to Tibetan astrology) should be in harmony with the bride-to-be. The woman who washed the bride-to-be's hair also had to have both her parents living.

The preparation of the wedding food includes *gro ma 'bras sil* (a sweet rice dish, for good luck), the Tibetan staple food *tsampa* (*tsam pa*, roasted flour mixed with butter tea), beef, mutton, yak butter, milk products and different types of Tibetan snacks. The hot dishes include fried sheep lung, stirred fried beef, ox tongue as well as other dishes. Compared with rural areas, other dishes are prepared in urban areas, and here the assortment includes Chinese food as well as Nepalese food.

A month from the wedding day, both families distribute barley (grain) and yeast to their relatives and neighbours and ask them to make barley beer. Today, both in the rural and urban areas, all kinds of modern beverages, especially beer, are available during the wedding ceremony.

In preparation for the wedding ceremony, several rooms have to be redecorated and refurnished with new fringes on the windows and doors, particularly in the living quarters, the shrine room, the bedrooms, the guest rooms, the kitchen and the storehouse.

4.4 The Wedding Day and Bringing the Bride Home

The day before the wedding ceremony, all preparations need to be ready, the boy's parents ask the ceremonial master (*khri chen*), the manager (*gnyer pa*) and the head of the beer maidens and her servants to arrive a day before the wedding ceremony. When the most important person, the ceremonial master, arrives, the beer girls offer him a ceremonial scarf and barley beer, and they request him to sing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 15):

shar phyogs shar nas phebs pa'i
*shar gyi khri gdugs nyi ma*⁴²
'dzam gling mun pa sel bar
phebs pa tsam gyis yag byung

lho phyogs lho nas phebs pa'i
lho yi khug bya sngon mo
dpyid kyi dro skyid sbyin par
phebs pa tsam gyis yag byung

skyid pa'i yul nas phebs pa'i
mi pho kham gsum dbang 'dus
mthon po'i bzhugs gral 'grim par
phebs pa tsam gyis yag byung

The eastern sun with endless radiance
That rises from the East
Is dispelling the darkness of the world.
[Your] arrival is much appreciated.

Having come from the southern direction,
The blue cuckoo from the south
Is bestowing warmth and happiness in Spring
[Your] arrival is much appreciated.

Having come from a happy place
The hero, conqueror of the three worlds,⁴³
Sitting at the head of the row
[Your] presence is much appreciated.

⁴² *Khri gdugs nyi ma* is a poetic expression for the sun: *khri* means 'throne', *gdugs* means 'umbrella' and the expression *khri gdugs* refers to the yellow umbrella over the seat of a high lama.

⁴³ In some references *kham gsum dbang 'dus* is an epithet of Avalokiteshvara, referring to him as the master of the three realms. The three realms are: the realm of desire (*'dod pa'i kham*), the realm of form (*gzhugs kham*) and the realm of formlessness (*gzhugs med kyi kham*).

The song uses nature imagery: the rising sun, the blue cuckoo and the spring as symbols of luck, happiness and appreciation.

Dancing together and singing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 15):

mi pho mi byad legs pa
ge sar rgyal po'i rgyud yin
rta bo rta byad legs pa
rkyang rgod g.yer pa'i rgyud yin
a ma khrung ma spam pa
seng lcam 'brug mo'i rgyud yin

A handsome he-man,
Must be a descendent of King Gesar.
A strong, sturdy horse,
Must be a descendent of the intelligent wild ass.
An attractive beer maiden (*a ma khrung ma*)⁴⁴
Must be a descendent of Sengcham Drugmo (*Seng lcam 'brug mo*)⁴⁵

This dancing song refers to the pan-Asian epic poem of King Gesar, made known throughout Tibetan cultural areas by epic bards (*sgrung mkhan*). King Gesar is regarded as an ancestor hero in Kham and expresses martial and heroic values. Tibetans regard Gesar as the model of courage, strength, power and good looks – what each Tibetan man wants to be.

The master of the ceremony (*khri chen*) and his servants reply in a song (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, pp. 15-16):

Lha sa'i dbus la bzhugs pa'i
jo shag yid bzhin nor bu
gzhon pa mi 'go 'grim pa'i
mgon skyabs gnang rogs gnang dang

⁴⁴ *A ma khrung ma* is the senior woman who serves *chang* (barley beer) at parties.

⁴⁵ Seng lcam 'brug mo is the wife of King Gesar.

khra 'brug gzhung la bzhugs pa'i
khra 'brug sgrol ma gsung byon
gzhon pa mi 'go 'grim pa'i
mgon skyabs gnang rogs gnang dang

gnas khang 'di la bzhugs pa'i
kh rung ma pad ma'i pad sdong
gzhon pa mi 'go 'grim pa'i
dpung rogs gnang rogs gnang dang

Seated in the centre of Lhasa
Jowo Shakyamuni, the wish-fulfilling gem,⁴⁶
Please grant the young one⁴⁷ your protection
While [she's] going to the other family's door

Seated in Drandrug village (Khra 'brug)
The miraculously speaking Tara at Drandrug (sGrol ma gsung byon)⁴⁸
Please grant the young one your protection
While [she's] going to the other family's door

Seated in this house, the ceremonial place
The beer maiden (*kh rung ma*) [who looks like] a stalk of the lotus flower
Please grant the young one your assistance
While [she's] going to the other family's door.

Dancing together and singing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 16):

yar shog bla ma'i bka' red
lha chos zhus shog gsung gis
tshur shog dpon po'i bka' red
gral 'go gnon shog gsung gis

⁴⁶ The statue of Shakyamuni Buddha in the Jokhang, the most sacred statue in all of Tibet.

⁴⁷ In oral language *gzhon pa* refers to the boy and not the girl, but in this song, I believe that *gzhon pa* refers to the newlywed couple.

⁴⁸ There are several statues of such miraculously speaking Taras in Tibetan areas.

yab yum gnyis kyi bka' red
nor bu len shog gsung gis

Come in! This is the order of the lama
Who told [me] to study the holy dharma
Come here! This is the chief's command
Who ordered me to arrange the row⁴⁹
Go and fetch the jewel!⁵⁰
This is the advice of my parents

As the ceremonial master and his fellows enter the living room, they begin to make preparations for their departure, as they will soon leave to take the bride into the groom's home early the next morning. Preparations for this journey usually include gifts of arrow banners,⁵¹ ceremonial scarves, incense, sugar, fruit, sweets, tea bricks, butter, bridal clothing, ornaments and barley beer.

On the second day, early in the morning, all the family members wear nice and new outfits, creating a joyous atmosphere as they sit in orderly rows with the ceremonial master at the head of the row. At this time, the manager serves butter tea and *gro ma 'bras sil*. A ceremonial scarf is offered to every one of the family members and this inaugurates a little banquet. The boy's family then sends the ceremonial master, his fellows and a horseman to fetch the bride. Before their journey, the beer maidens serve them barley beer and sing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 18):

steng phyogs lha nas phebs pa'i
lha sras tshangs pa dkar po
lan gcig 'di ru ma bzhugs
nor bu len par phebs dang

bar phyogs btsan nas phebs pa'i

⁴⁹ The head of the row here refers to the head of the subjects.

⁵⁰ Here jewel (*nor bu*) means the bride.

⁵¹ Arrow banners, used at weddings, are ceremonial arrows which have ribbons of different colours fastened to them.

mi pho kham s gsum dbang 'dus
lan gcig 'di ru ma bzhugs
nor bu len par phebs dang

'og phyogs klu nas phebs pa'i
klu rgyal gtsug na'i sras po
lan gcig 'di ru ma bzhugs
nor bu len par phebs dang

The heavenly son of white Brahma
Who came from the heavenly abode
Please go and fetch the jewel
[Instead of] staying here for a second

The hero, the conqueror of the three worlds,
Who came from the intermediate realm of the spirits (*btsan*)⁵²
Please go and fetch the jewel
[Instead of] staying here for a second

The prince of Manicuda, the king of the nagas,
Who came from the lower realm of the nagas
Please go and fetch the jewel
[Instead of] staying here for a second

Dancing together and singing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, pp. 18-19):

g.yas nas mchod chang bkyag yod
a rag bdud rtsi bkyag yod
g.yon nas ja khra bkyag yod
gser gyi ja khra bkyag yod
rin chen nor bu lon pa'i

⁵² According to pre-Buddhist cosmology, the cosmos is divided into three spheres: the upper, the intermediate and the underground worlds. Certain deities or spirits live in the upper world, various spirits (*btsan*) live in the intermediate world, and the *klu* or *nagas* live in the underground world.

bkra shis smon lam zhus yod

Barley beer, the nectar-like liquor
Has been served from the right side,
The teapot has been offered from the left,
The golden teapot has been offered
[We] have made the best wishes
In order to receive the precious jewel.

Three greeting teams (consisting of three or four people) from the bride's family wait at different locations for the team of the ceremonial master from the boy's family. When they meet the first welcoming team, they exchange the traditional greeting *Tashi Delek* ('May everything be well'), ceremonial scarves and barley beer. The beer maidens from the bride's side will sing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 19):

*gser zangs*⁵³ *gser gyi zam pa'i sgang la*
bdag gi tsan dan bla ma'i chibs kha yar 'dren gnang dang
dngul zangs dngul gyi zam pa'i sgang la
bdag gi 'go 'dren dpon po'i chibs kha yar 'dren gnang dang
dung zangs dung gi zam pa'i sgang la
bdag gi a ma chang ma'i chibs kha yar 'dren gnang dang

On the bridge made of excellent copper and gold
Please invite the riding horse of my perfect lama
On the bridge made of excellent silver
Please invite the riding horse of my chief.
On the bridge made of excellent conch shell,
Please invite the riding horse of my ceremonial beer server.

Dancing together and singing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 19-20):

rgya bya nag po

⁵³ *Zangs* does not make sense here and should probably be *bzang*, meaning 'excellent'. It should also be *bzang* and not *zangs* in line 3 and in line 5.

rgya bya nag po
rtsig pa'i g.yas zur nas bltas pas
bdag gi tsdad ldan bla ma'i bzhugs nyams las dod pa
rgya bya nag po
rgya bya nag po
rtsig pa'i g.yon zur nas bltas pas
bdag gi 'go 'dren dpon po'i bzhugs nyams las dod pa
rgya bya nag po
rgya bya nag po
g.yas zur g.yon zur nas bltas pas
bdag gi a ma chang ma'i bzhugs nyams las dod pa

A dark phoenix
A dark phoenix
Looking from the right corner of the room⁵⁴
No one is seated more dignified than my perfect Lama

A dark phoenix
A dark phoenix
Looking from the left corner of the room
No one is seated more dignified than my Chief

A dark phoenix
A dark phoenix
Looking from both corners, left and right, [of the room]
No one is seated more charmingly than my beer server

The ceremonial master replies with this song (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 120):

rgya gar shar gyi ri la
shing sna bsdu bar phyin pas

⁵⁴ The text says 'wall', *rtsig pa*.

shing bzang lo ma rgyas pa
dang po zhig dang mjal byung

rgya gar shar gyi ri la
rtswa sna bsdu bar phyin pas
pad sdong bzhad kha phye ba
dang po zhig dang mjal byung

rgya gar shar gyi ri la
chu sna bsdu bar phyin pas
chu mo dwangs bzang dbang mo
dang po zhig dang mjal byung

To the mountains in eastern India
[I] went to collect various trees
And there I saw an excellent tree
With flourishing leaves

To the mountains in eastern India
[I] went to pick up different kinds of grass
And there [I] saw the best lotus stalk
With blossoming lotus flowers

To the mountains in eastern India
[I] went to fetch different kinds of water
And there I saw the best water
With a good and clear appearance

Dancing together and singing (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 74, as also translated above):

g.yag gu rog po sga cha rog rog
byang tsha len par sga cha rog rog
mi nyag mtshal mo gom 'gros shig shig

rgya ja len par gom 'gros shig shig
gzhon pa nga tsho dpung gdang shig shig
nor bu len par dpung gdang shig shig

Black yaks with similar black saddles keeping step
While transporting salt from the north, black saddles are harmonious.
Mules from Minyak are moving side by side
While transporting Chinese tea, they are moving side by side
We, the young men, are going shoulder to shoulder
While inviting the jewel, we are standing shoulder to shoulder

The second greeting place is located not far from the first one. The short ceremony is repeated here again, and the greeting team offers barley beer to the ceremonial master's team and sing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 21):

ri mgo brgya la phyin pas
ri sna lnga brgya dang mjal byung
ri byad yag rang drags pa
ri rgyal lhun po dang mjal byung

chu mgo brgya la phyin pas
chu sna lnga brgya dang mjal byung
chu byad yag rang drags pa
yar 'brog g.yu mtsho dang mjal byung

mi mgo brgya la phyin pas
mi san lnga brgya dang mjal byung
mi byad yag rang drags pa
ge sar rgyal po dang mjal byung

Heading for hundreds of mountain peaks
[We] encountered five hundred different mountains
[At the end], we met Mt. Sumeru, the king of the mountains
Whose shape and appearance are most excellent

Heading for hundreds of river sources
[We] encountered five hundred river tributaries
[We] saw Yamdrok Turquoise Lake⁵⁵
Whose shape is most beautiful

Going to meet hundreds of leading people
[We] met five hundred different people
[At the end], (we) met King Gesar
Who is the most handsome

Dancing together and singing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 21):

ri rgyal lhun po bzhin gyi
rtsa ba gzhan las brtan pa
yar 'brog g.yu mtsho bzhin gyi
ro bcud gzhan las mngar ba
Ge sar rgyal po bzhin gyi
brjid nyams gzhan las dod pa

Like Mt. Sumeru, the king of mountains
The foundation is more stable than any others
Like Yamdrok Turquoise Lake
The water is more tasty and nutritious than any others
Like King Gesar
[He] is more dignified than anyone else

The ceremonial master replies in song (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 21):

dgun kha rgya la skyid pa
rgya nag rgyal po'i gdan sa
dbyar kha bod la skyid pa

⁵⁵ Yam 'drog mTsho, is Tibet's second largest lake, and is perceived by the Tibetans as one of the most holy lakes in all of Tibet.

srong btsan sgam po'i gdan sa
rgya bod gnyis kyi bar la
gser gyi zam pa btsugs yod

It is happy in China during winter
The land of the Chinese emperor
It is happy in Tibet during the summer
The land of King Songtsen Gampo
Between China and Tibet
A golden bridge has been built

Dancing together (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, pp. 21-22):

g.yas phyogs rgyal po bzhad bzhad
rgyal po srong btsan sgam po
g.yon phyogs btsun mo bzhad bzhad
btsun mo rgya sa kong jo
dkyil phyogs blon po bzhad bzhad
blon po mgar ba stong btsan

On the right side is the king
The mighty king Songtsen Gampo
On the left side is the queen
The beautiful queen Wencheng
In the middle is the minister
The intelligent Minister Garwa Tongtsen

As soon as the ceremonial master's team arrives at the third greeting group, at last reaching the bride's family gate, the representatives of the bride's side present a ceremonial scarf which indicates sincere respect, and the beer girls offer a bowl of barley beer and sing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, pp. 23-24):

dga' ba'i phyogs nas yong yod
skyid pa'i nyi ma shar byung

nga'i bla ma dus gsum sangs rgyas dang mjal byung

dga' ba'i phyogs nas yong yod

skyid pa'i nyi ma shar byung

nga'i dpon po khams gsum dbang 'dus dang mjal byung

dga' ba'i phyogs nas yong yod

skyid pa'i nyi ma shar byung

nga'i a ma chang zhim bag gro dang mjal byung

[I] came from a happy land

A pleasant sun has risen

[And I] met my Lama, the Buddha of the three times

[I] came from a happy land

A pleasant sun has risen

[And I] met my chief, the conqueror of the three worlds

[I] came from a happy land

A pleasant sun has risen

[And I] met my elegant beer maiden, who serves the best beer

Dancing together and singing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 24):

g.yas.....g.yas la shig pa gnang dang

g.yas phyogs la dpa' bo'i bzhugs sa dgos yod

g.yon.....gyon la shig pa gnang dang

g.yon phyogs la dpa' mo'i bzhugs sa dgos yod

dkyil.....dkyil la shig pa gnang dang

dkyil la a ma chang ma'i bzhugs sa dgos yod

Right...move to the right side, please

A seat is needed for the hero on the right

Left...move to the left side, please

A seat is needed for the heroine on the left
Middle ...move in the middle, please
A seat is needed for the beer maiden in the middle

The ceremonial master presents a ceremonial scarf and replies with a song (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 24):

rgya gar gnas ri mtho ba
rma bya sgro mdongs mtshar ba
kong yul shing sna 'dzoms pa
ne tso gsung skad snyan pa
Yamdruk rtsa chu 'dzoms pa
ma mo'i bal rdzob mthug pa

The sacred mountain of India is high
The feather crest of the peacock is attractive
Kongpo⁵⁶ is rich with an abundant variety of trees
The melodies of the parrot are pleasant
Yamdruk⁵⁷ is rich with water and grass
The wool of the sheep (*ma mo*)⁵⁸ is thick

Dancing together (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 24):

o lo'i sems pa rgya gar rma bya la shor song
sems pa phra mo rma bya'i sgro mdongs la shor song
o lo'i sems pa kong yul ne tso la shor song
sems pa phra mo ne tso'i gsung skad la shor song
o lo'i sems pa Yamdruk ma mo la shor song
sems pa phra mo ma mo'i bal rdzob la shor song

The boy's heart was attracted by the peacock in India

⁵⁶ A region in southeastern TAR.

⁵⁷ Yamdruk (Yam 'drog) is the name of both a sacred lake and an area.

⁵⁸ A *ma mo* is an adult female sheep.

The little heart was attracted by the peacock's feather crest
The boy's heart was attracted by the parrot in Kongpo
The little heart was attracted by the parrot's pleasant songs
The boy's heart was attracted by the female sheep (*ma mo*) in Yamdrok
The little heart was attracted by the thick wool of the sheep

After singing such songs, the ceremony master leads his followers and enters the gate of the bride's home. A prayer flag held by the ceremony master is taken to the roof of the home and is set up facing the south. A young man from the bride's side holds a plate of *phye mar* with his right hand and an arrow banner in his left hand, and circumambulates once around the *bsang*,⁵⁹ which is being offered as a sign of the auspiciousness of this wonderful day, at the centre of the family courtyard. In the meantime, the beer girls hold barley beer and sing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 26, as also translated above):

ri bo g.yas ri g.yon ri
phar shig tshur shig gnang dang
bdag gi mtshad ldan bla ma'i
chibs chen phebs dgos yod do
chibs chen phebs pa'i zhabs rjes
pad ma'i thang nas gsal byung

The mountains on both the right and the left sides
Please [make a space] on each side
The great horse of my perfect lama
Should come
The footprints of the great riding horse
Were clearly imprinted on the lotus plain.

Dancing together and singing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 26, as also translated above):

ge sar rgyal po bzhin gyi

⁵⁹ *bSang* is incense usually offered to deities by burning barley flour and conifer branches. Liquor or water is also sprinkled as offerings to the deities.

phyag mdas ma khog byas byung
rkyang rgod g.yer pa bzhin gyi
srab mdas ma khog byas byung
a ma chang ma bzhin gyi
ja khras mi gyong byas byung

Like King Gesar's arrow
Nothing can stop it [from flying]
Like the intelligent wild ass
It cannot be controlled by reins.
Like the beer maiden's
Beer pot, it cannot be emptied

Then follows the reply song by the ceremonial master (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 24):

bkra shis lung pa'i phu la
mi 'dzoms zhu yas mi 'dug
tsan dan sdong pos gtso byas
shing sna gzhan las 'dzoms pa

bkra shis lung pa'i bar la
mi 'dzoms zhu yas mi 'dug
lo yag ljang pas gtso byas
'bru sna gzhan las 'dzoms pa

bkra shis lung pa'i mda' la
mi 'dzoms zhu yas mi 'dug
dwangs sangs dbang mos gtso byas
chu sna gzhan las 'dzoms pa

To the upper part of the auspicious valley
One cannot say that it lacks resources
All the types of trees headed by sandalwood

Are more abundant than in other places

In the middle part of the auspicious valley

One cannot say that it lacks resources

All the varieties of grain headed by the seedlings that bring a good harvest

Are more abundant than in any other places

In the lower part of the auspicious valley

One cannot say that it lacks resources

All the types of rivers headed by Dangsang Wangmo⁶⁰

Are more abundant than in other places

Dancing together and singing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 27):

nam mkha' yar la sprin dkar po la

yar la 'ja' ris bzhad bzhad

tsan dan bla ma lags phebs kyi yog red gsung byung

phyi ma'i yar 'dren lags gnang gi yog red gsung byung

sa gzhi ma la rta bo'i rdog bgrod lags

yar la 'ja' ris bzhad bzhad

'go 'dren dpon po lags phebs kyi yog red gsung byung

mgo 'don lung bzang lags gnang gi yog red gsung byung

bzhugs gral phyogs la a ma chang ma lags

yar la 'ja' ris bzhad bzhad

chang dang ja khra lags gnang gi yog red gsung byung

rkang bro glu gzhas lags gnang gi yog red gsung byung

There are white clouds in the sky high up there

With colourful rainbows

It is said that the perfect Lama is coming

⁶⁰ Name of a river.

It is said that he will lead us in the next life
There are chip-clops of the horse's hooves on the ground down there
And colourful rainbows are up there
It is said that our chief, the leader, is coming
And it is said that he will lead us in life

The beer maiden is near the seating row
And colourful rainbow are up there
It is said that we will be given tea and beer
And it is said that she will sing and dance

After such songs are sung, the ceremonial master presents the ceremonial scarf to the gate, to the pillar, to the water bucket (*chu ban*) and to the animal dung. Subsequently, the girl's family invites the ceremonial master, his fellows and other ceremony participants into the living room and serve them food and drinks. Meanwhile, the song called *gZim chung ka bzhi gdung brgyad* is sung by the beer girls and the ceremonial master together (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 34):

gzim chung ka bzhi gdung brgyad
bdag gi bla ma bzhugs yod
thams cad mkhyen pa bzhugs yod
thams cad mkhyen pa'i bzhugs nyams las dod pa
gzhon pa nga tsho'i brten sa ma nor ba byas byung

gzim chung ka bzhi gdung brgyad
bdag gi dpon po bzhugs yod
kham s gsum dbang 'dus bzhugs yod
kham s gsum dbang 'dus bzhugs nyams las dod pa
gzhon pa nga tsho'i brten sa ma nor ba byas byung

gzim chung ka bzhi gdung brgyad
bdag gi a ma bzhugs yod
chang gzhi bag gro bzhugs yod
a ma chang ma'i bzhugs nyams las dod pa

gzhon pa nga tsho'i brten sa ma nor ba byas byung

In the living quarters with four pillars and eight beams ⁶¹
My Lama is there
He is an omniscient being.
The omniscient [one], is sitting more dignified than others
It is not wrong that we, the young people, rely on his support

In the living quarters with four pillars and eight beams
My chief is living there
He is the conqueror of the three worlds
The conqueror of the three worlds is sitting more dignified than others
It is not wrong that we, the young people, rely on his support

In the living quarters with four pillars and eight beams
My mother is living there
She is a pleasant beer brewer
The beer maker is sitting more elegantly than others
It is not wrong that we, the young people, rely on her support

Dancing together and singing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 34):

ka ba 'gyur yong bsam nas
ka gdan rdo la bcol yod
gdung ma 'gyur yong bsam nas
gzhu mo 'be log btang yod
lcam dang dral ma rnams tsho
rma bya'i sgro las mtshar ba

Having thought the pillar would be unstable
[We] put a stone as support for the pillar
Having thought the beam would be unstable

⁶¹ *Ka bzhi gdung brgyad* means a good room or house. The literal meaning is 'four pillars and eight beams'.

[We] made a wooden support between the beam and the pillar
The small beams and pieces of wood
Are more colourful than the peacock's feather

When the ceremonial master and his followers are seated, the manager offers them butter tea and *gro ma 'bras sil*, while the beer girls sing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 37):

gral stod gser la bcol yod
gser sku phyag na rdo rje
gral dkyil g.yu la bcol yod
g.yu yag sgrol ma gsung byon
gral gsham dung la bcol yod
dung gshog ra ma rgyal mo

[We] entrusted at the upper seating row
The golden statue of Vajrapani
[We] entrusted at the middle seating row
The turquoise statue of the miraculous speaking Tara.
[We] entrusted at the lower seating row
A conch shell [statue] of the goat queen, who has conch wings

Dancing together (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 37):

gral stod zhal dkar bzhad bzhad
zhal dkar yu ring bzhad bzhad
gral dkyil mchod rdzas bzhad bzhad
mchod rdzas rdzab ya ser po
gral gsham ja khra bzhad bzhad
ja khra gser gyi sgor mo

Bowls made of china are filled at the upper seating row
The white bowls with long stands
Abundant offerings are presented at the middle seating row

They are placed in a yellow wooden bowl.⁶²

Numerous teapots are placed at the lower seating row

The round teapots are made of gold

After a big round of applause, the ceremonial master stands up and presents a ceremonial scarf first to the bride and then to the bride's parents and other family members. Subsequently, a Tibetan robe, a pair of shoes and jewels are also presented to the bride by the boy's family. Standing in the middle of the crowd, full of curious friends and relatives who attempt to see the abundance of gifts that the groom's side has prepared, the ceremonial master sings (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 41):

g.yas ri gser la bcol yod
g.yon ri dngul la bcol yod
gser dngul lhas ma bs las nas
jo bor gser shog sgron yod

g.yas ri gro la bcol yod
g.yon ri 'bras la bcol yod
gro 'bras lhas ma bs las nas
jo bor mandala phul yod

g.yas ri dar la bcol yod
g.yon ri gos la bcol yod
dar gos lhas ma bs las nas
bu mor na bza' sgron yod
bu mor na bza' sgron nas
phyag la phebs pa gnang dang

We get gold from the mountain on the right

And silver from the mountain on the left

By knitting gold and silver

[We] have covered the image of Jowo with a golden sheet

⁶² *rDzab ya* is a very high quality wooden bowl made from a tree burl.

We get wheat from the mountain on the right
And rice from the mountain on the left
By mixing wheat and rice
[We] offered a mandala to the Jowo

We get silk from the mountain on the right
And cotton from the mountain on the left
By knitting silk and cotton
[We] made a [wedding] dress for the daughter
After we dressed up the daughter
Please welcome her

Dancing together and singing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 42):

g.yas la mjal dar btang yod
dkar ka gtsang ba btang yod
g.yon la sman tse btang yod
dri mchog zhim pa btang yod
mjal dar sman tse gnyis la
dbye ba yong sa ma red

[We] presented an offering scarf on the right side
A white and pure scarf
[We] burned medicinal herbs on the left side
Herbs with fragrant smell
The offering scarf and the medicinal herbs
Are not any different [in terms of auspiciousness]

On the eve of the wedding ceremony, the girl's family holds a farewell party. All of the relatives and neighbours will come to say goodbye. They bring ceremonial scarves, legs of sheep, clothes and wedding money. At the farewell party, the bride sits in the middle of the banquet and her bridesmaid will sit beside her. On the left and right sides, the ceremonial leader and the mother's senior brother, the parents, relatives and the other family members sit

on cushions arranged in accordance with their rank. After everyone has found their seats, the ceremonial leader will present ceremonial scarves to the girl and her family. At that time, a young man (his parents should still be living and in good health), who wears a white robe, will serve *phyé mar*,⁶³ *chang phud* and sweet rice. The girl's family will hand over the dowry to the ceremonial master. Then her relatives and friends will present ceremonial scarves and gifts too. After the ceremony is over, a party is held, at which everyone sings and dances till dawn.

4.5 The Sending-off Ceremony and the Three Greetings

On the wedding day, early in the morning, the celebration of the departure of the bride will be held at an auspicious time, usually starting around 6 or 7 a.m. A group of people, led by the ceremonial master's team, will walk slowly out of the gate, carrying the dowry with them. The ceremonial master will hold a coloured arrow (*mda' dar*) and lead the bride out of her home with a ceremonial scarf. At same time he will give a wedding speech to the bride (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 59):

*gnas nor 'dzin yang pa'i khyim 'dzin ma
khyed mi dang mi 'dra lha yi bu mo 'dra
brgya yi dkyil nas bdams pa yin
stong gi dkyil nas bsgrugs pa yin
brgya stong gnyis kyi dkyil nas phebs pa 'dra
phar la phebs dus mig gis skyel ma zhus
tshur la phebs dus so dkar 'dzum gyis bsu ma zhus
gtso bo yab yum gnyis la gus zhabs mdzod
yang sgos sras pho rnams la skyong dar mdzod
bu gsum pang du lon pa'i bkra shis kyi mgul dar 'di 'bul lo*

You, the household of the vast precious land
Don't look like a human but like a heavenly daughter
You are the one, who is chosen among hundreds
And the one chosen among thousands

⁶³ A propitious funnelled box with barleys and *tsam pa* put separately inside.

You seem to have come from among hundreds of thousands
When [you] left to the other site, we followed you with our eyes
When you came here, we welcomed you with smiles
Your main task is to respect [your] parents-[in-law]
In particular, you must take good care of your husband and brothers-in-law
I will offer you this auspicious scarf that will bring three sons⁶⁴ on your lap

Then the colourful arrow will be placed onto the back collar of the bride and a jade piece is placed on her head, which shows she will have her own home from now on. At this point in time, a young man (whose parents are still living and in good health) in the house of the bride will hold a colourful arrow in the right hand and a plate of *phye mar* in the left hand (in some areas, a young man holds a leg of mutton in his left hand instead of the *phye mar*), walking around and performing the ceremony of soliciting fortune and happiness, before proceeding to the roof of the house. This ritual, called *g.yang 'gugs*, is carried out in order to summon the forces of prosperity.

On the way, sending the bride to the groom's home, the mother's senior brother, the ceremonial master and their fellows turn around three times and look back before they meet the first 'welcome team' from the groom's side. Upon their third look back, the mother's senior brother, who rides a horse, throws a ceremonial scarf into the air. As the scarf falls onto the ground, a man from the bride's side picks it up and ties it on the door knob of the bride's home gate so as to solicit fortune and happiness.

Usually, the welcoming team (the leader of the ceremony and his servants) will go first. The escort team (the mother's senior brother, his servants, the beer girls and the bridesmaid) follow in the rear. The bride will go or ride a horse between the two parties. In the past, a white horse was given for the bride to ride on, but nowadays a tractor or car is used.

Coming across people who are carrying full buckets of water or full baskets of other things, or passing a tall prayer flag (*dar chen*) or a temple with *tsha tsha* (votive tablets of clay), is believed to bring good luck, and the party must present a ceremonial scarf as a gift.

⁶⁴ In Tibet, giving birth to three boys in a row is considered auspicious, while giving birth to three girls in a row is viewed as a bad sign.

Inauspicious signs include meeting someone emptying a garbage can or carrying an empty basket, or if it snows on the wedding day.

When the group walks (or rides) to the groom's family, it is the custom that a welcoming party (*bsu chang*), consisting of three or four people, will welcome the bride with beer (three greetings), and a short ceremony will be held. In the past, if journey was long, the team would ride horses or carriages to the wedding, but now tractors and cars are mostly used.

When the group arrives at the edge of the village, the first greeting group waits for them there. One man born in an auspicious year, wearing a white robe, will hold the bowl of barley beer and sing with several beer maidens (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 72):

nyi ma ga nas phebs pa
shar gyi phyogs nas phebs pa
'dzam gling sa gzhi gso bar
phebs pa tsam gyis yag byung
zla ba ga nas phebs pa
mtshan mo'i gzhung nas phebs pa
'dzam gling mun pa sel bar
phebs pa tsam gyis yag byung
rma bya ga nas phebs pa
nags kyi dkyil nas phebs byung
mdzes pa'i sgro mdongs ngom par
phebs pa tsam gyis yag byung

Sun, where do you come from?
I came from the eastern direction
By nourishing the soil of the world
Your coming is highly appreciated

Moon, where do you come from?
I came from the dark place
By eliminating the darkness of the world
Your coming is highly appreciated

Peacock, where do you come from?
I came from the midst of the forest
By showing the beauty of feathers
Your coming is highly appreciated

Dancing together and singing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 73):

shar phyogs shar nas mjal byung
drod 'jam nyi ma mjal byung
mtshan mo'i gzhung nas mjal byung
dkar gsal zla ba mjal byung
zhing bzang 'di nas mjal byung
sran ma'i me tog mjal byung

[We] have seen the warm and soft sun
From the eastern side

[We] have seen the bright and clear moon,
At night, when it became dark

[We] have seen the bean flowers
From this excellent field

The uncle replies (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 41):

dga' ba'i phyogs nas yong bas
skyid pa'i nyi ma shar byung
dro 'jam nyi ma shar byung
khri gdugs nyi ma shar byung
nga yi mgo 'dren mjal byung
kham gsum dbang 'dus mjal byung

dga' ba'i phyogs nas yong bas
skyid pai' zla ba shar byung
zla ba dkar po shar byung

dkar po sgor sgor shar byung
nga yi snying sdug mjal byung
snying sdug mdzes ma mjal byung

Coming from the direction of happiness
I saw the pleasant sun rising
A warm and gentle sun has risen
A sun with thousands of radiances has risen
There I met the chief who leads me
And who was the conqueror of the three worlds
Coming from the direction of happiness
I saw the pleasant moon is rising
The moon round in shape has risen
There I met my beloved one
I met the one who is dearest to my heart

Dancing together (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 41):

g.yas la sha krad bzhag yod
ba so'i sha krad bzhag yod
g.yon la mdzub rgyus bzhag yod
g.yu gser khra brgyab bzhag yod

I have placed a Shabtre⁶⁵ on my right side
A ring that is made of ivory
On my left side, a ring is placed
It is adorned with turquoise and gold

The second place the greeting group stops is not far from the groom's home. Here they perform the ceremony of receiving the bride's team in the same way as when they met the first greeting group. They offer barley beer to the ceremonial master and other members in the team and sing (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 72):

⁶⁵ A kind of ring made out of ivory and the horn of a deer.

*bkra shis lha yi khang bzang
dgung gi nyi ma zla wa
'dzam gling nyi od 'phros nas
mun pa sel ba yod do*

*mi tshos nor bu len dus
gru shan rta mgos len yong
nga tshos nor bu len dus
chang dang ja khras len yong*

*mtsho de 'o ma mtsho la
mtsho bdag sgrol ma gsung byon
tshong dpon nor bu bzang pos
nor bu zhu bar bcar yod
rang yul skyid po med kyang
bzas sna 'dzoms po yod red
nor bus phebs rogs gnang dang*

The auspicious and heavenly house
The sun and the moon in the sky
The rays will be spread in the world
The darkness will be dispelled

When others transport jewels
They transport it with a boat adorned with a horse head⁶⁶
When we invite the jewel
We invite her with barley beer and tea⁶⁷

The lake is made of milk
Its owner is the Tara who miraculously speaks
[I], the merchant Norbu Sangpo,⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ferry-boat with the bow carved as a horse's head.

⁶⁷ *Ja khra* is a type of teapot.

Have come here to invite the jewel
My homeland is not pleasant
But all kinds of food are present
Jewel, please come [with me]

Dancing together and singing (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 73):

rta pho bkra shis gro dkar
o los⁶⁹ bzhon nas yong yod
'gros dang gom pa'i phyong la
sems khral byed dgos mi 'dug

I have come here riding
An auspicious horse with a white chest
Concerning the trot and the movements of the horse
There is no need to be worried

The uncle replies (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 74):

rgya gar yul nas thon pa'i
rgya gar rma bya'i sgro mdongs
de thso bum pa bzang po'i
sgro rgyan nyan pa yod do

bal po'i yul nas thon pa'i
bal po'i g.yu dang byu ru
de thso bum pa bzang po'i
phra rgyan nyan pa yod do

Lha sa'i gzhung nas thon pa'i
Lha sa'i skyid chu sngon mo

⁶⁸ The merchant Nor bu bZang po is often mentioned in Tibetan folk songs, especially in songs about Prince Padma 'Od 'bar, one of the librettos of Tibetan opera, where Nor bu bZang po is the main character or protagonist.

⁶⁹ *O lo* means 'boy' in western Tibetan dialects.

de tsho bum pa bzang po'i
bum chu nyan pa yod do

The feather crests of a peacock
That were produced in India
Can suitably be used as
Decorations of the perfect vase

Having been produced in Nepal
The Nepalese turquoise and corals
Can suitably be used as
Decorations of the perfect vase

The green Kyichu River of Lhasa
That flows from Lhasa Valley
Can suitably be used as
The holy water inside the vase

Dancing together and singing (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 75):

yā 'a la..... phu ya la shing sna 'dzoms pa
yā 'a la..... byi'u chung 'jol mo skyid la 'khyol song
yā 'a la..... bar ya la rtswa sna 'dzoms pa
yā 'a la..... g.yag gu rog po skyid la 'khyol song
yā 'a la..... mda' mar la chu sna 'dzoms pa
yā 'a la..... ser bya ngang pa skyid la 'khyol song

Yala, the upper part of the valley is rich with various trees
Yala, how happy the nightingale's life is!
Yala, the middle part of the valley is rich with various grasses
Yala, how happy the life of the small black yak is!
Yala, the lower part of the valley is rich with various rivers
Yala, how happy the life of the yellow duck is!

When they meet people who are carrying full buckets of water or full baskets of other things, they will present ceremonial scarves and sing (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 73):

rgya gar shar gyi ri la
rtsa sna bsdu ru phyin pas
me tog zhal kha phye ba
dang po gcig dang mjal byung
rgya gar shar gyi ri la
shing sna bsdu ru phyin pas
shing bzang lo 'dab rgyas pa
dang po gcig dang mjal byung
rgya gar shar gyi ri la
chu sna bsdu ru phyin pas
rgya mtsho zhal lud shor ba
dang po gcig dang mjal byung

To the mountains in eastern India
[We] went to collect grass
[We] saw the best blooming flowers
To the mountains in eastern India
[We] went to collect various trees
We saw the best trees with flourishing leaves
To the mountains in eastern India
[We] went to fetch different kinds of water
[We] saw the best ocean
That overflows

The third greeting group pauses in front of the groom's home, and here the groom's parents, all of his family members and their relatives and friends greet the team. As soon as the group arrives, the beer girl offers barley beer and sings (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 91):

g.yas la lcang dkar btab yod

lcang dkar 'ja' ris shig shig
g.yon la lcang smug btsugs yod
lcang smug 'ja' ris shig shig
lchag dkar lchag smug bar la
klu mo'i klu khang brgyab yod
klu mo mjal 'dod yod na
klu rdzas bsnams nas phebs dang
klu rdzas mang po mi dgos
dar tshon sna lngas chog pa

White willow trees have been planted on the right side
 The white willows look like rainbow
 And purple willows are planted on the left side
 The purple willows look like the rainbow
 Between the white and purple willow trees
 A palace for the queen of naga has been built
 If you wish to visit the naga queen (*klu mo*)⁷⁰
 Please come and bring some substances to worship the naga
 No need of too many items
 The five-coloured prayer flags will do

Dancing together and singing (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 88):

'di ru 'dzoms pa'i pho gzhon tsho
gnam la shar ba'i skar ma las mtshar ba
'di ru 'dzoms pa'i mo gzhon tsho
sa la skyes pa'i me tog las 'tshar ba
zhabs bro brgyab na stag shar⁷¹ gzhon pas brgyab
glu chung len na dman chung bu mos len
rtsa ba la da rtsa ba
rtsa ba gser gyi sdong po
lo ma la da lo ma

⁷⁰ A female naga.

⁷¹ *sTag shar gzhon pa* is a young man full of energy and vigour.

lo ma g.yu yi lo ma
g.yas la bkra shis kha btags
g.yon la tshe dbang bum pa

The young men who gathered here
Are brighter than the stars shining in the sky
The young girls who gathered here
Are more beautiful than the flowers blossoming on the earth
Dancing is performed by the tiger-like young men
Singing is sung by the young girls
The root is unusually remarkable
As the root is that of gold
The leaves are also extraordinary
As they are that of turquoise
A ceremonial scarf is placed on the right side
And a vase of longevity on the left side

The girl's uncle replies by offering barley beer and singing (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 81):

phu yi spang rgyan me tog
mda' yi sran ma'i me tog
'khrungs sa'i 'khrungs yul mi gcig
'dzoms sa mchod gshom phra mo
phu yi ge sar rgyal po
mda' yi seng lcam 'brug mo
'khrungs sa'i 'khrungs yul mi gcig
'dzoms sa gnas khang 'di ru
phu yi thang dkar rgod po
mda' yi smyug gsar yar skyes
'khrungs sa'i 'khrungs yul mi gcig
'dzoms ss mda' mdong phra mo

The wildflowers of the upper valley

And the lentils of the lower valley
 Even though [they] have different birthplaces
 They are encountered at the same place, the little altar
 King Gesar of the upper valley
 And [his consort] Sengcham Drugmo⁷² of the lower valley
 Even though they were born in different places
 Where they are encountered is this sacred house
 The white vulture of the upper valley
 And the sprouting new bamboo of the lower valley
 Even though they have different birthplaces
 The place where they have gathered is this small quiver

Dancing together and singing (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 81):

skas ru gser tshag dngul tshag
'dzegs bzhin 'dzegs bzhin yong yod
gzim chung nyi 'od skyid pa
mjal 'phrad gzhan las 'dod pa
nyi 'od skyid po'i nang la
na chung mdzes ma bzhugs bzhag
nga la na chung mdzes ma'i
mjal kha gnang rongs gnang dang

[I] have gradually climbed the staircases
 Whose frame is inlaid with gold and silver
 The happy and brightly shining quarters
 Are delightful at sight
 In the brightly shining happy quarter
 A beautiful young girl is seated
 May the young beautiful girl
 Grant me an audience

⁷² The wife of King Gesar.

Before the group arrives at the groom's home, the groom's family will have the gate decorated. They will have set up two stones, one black and the other white, at the gate, which respectively symbolise disease, poverty and misfortune and wealth, health and auspiciousness. A cushion is also prepared in front of the house in order to make the dismounting from the horse comfortable for the bride. The cushion is covered with a piece of colourful embroidered cloth, and on the top of the cushion, barley in the shape of the propitious swastika (*g.yung drung*)⁷³ is placed.

The uncle will present an offering scarf to the white stone on the right side of the door and offer a praising speech (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 47):

zhang chen nga yi g.yas su yod pa'i tho po dkar po 'di
'dre yis brtsigs pa'i tho po ga nas yin
mi yis brtsigs pa'i tho po ga nas yin
lha yis brtsigs pa'i tho po dkar po 'di
sa gzhi pad ma'i steng gi mchod rten dbyibs
rtsa ba zur bzhis brgyan pa 'di
rgyal chen sde bzhi gnas pa'i rtags
'gyur ba med pa'i ngang du bzhugs
sked pa rin chen bum pa'i dbyibs
'bru sna gser dngul dar zab khengs
longs spyod 'phel ba'i ngang du bzhugs
rtse mo gser gyi nyi zlas brgyan pa 'di
rigs sras de gnyis nyi zla'i 'od dang mtsungs
phyi yi lcags ri tho po 'di la gnas
nang gi nor bu tho po 'di la gnas
lha tho tho ri yi sku rgyud yin
tshangs pa brgya byin rnams kyi byin gyis brlabs
bkra shis pa'i tho po dkar po la
g.yang lon pa'i mjal dar zhig bsgron rgyu yin

The white cairn to the right side of your uncle

⁷³ The swastika is originally introduced in Tibet from India. Tibetans use the word *g.yung drung*. It is a symbol of good fortune, luck or success.

How can it be piled up by demons?
 How can it be piled up by humans?
 This white cairn piled up by the gods
 [Is] shaped like a stupa on the lotus-like earth
 The base adorned with four corners
 Is a sign that the four guardian kings dwell here
 Staying [here] without changing
 The middle of the cairn is shaped like a treasure vase
 That is filled with various grains, gold, silk and brocade
 Standing here in the nature of flourishing prosperity
 The top is adorned with a golden sun and moon
 These two noble children⁷⁴ resemble the light of the sun and the moon
 There is a wall outside the cairn
 There is a jewel inside the cairn
 A descendant of King Lha Thothori⁷⁵
 It has been blessed by Brahma and Indra
 To this auspicious white cairn
 [I] will present an offering scarf that grants prosperity

Then the uncle goes to the black stone, and gives a speech as follows (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 47):

bde legs su gyur cig
zhang chen nga yi g.yon du yod pa'i 'dre tho nag po khyod
mi yis brtsigs pa'i tho po ga nas yin
lha yis brtsigs pa'i tho po ga nas yin
'dre yis brtsigs pa'i 'dre tho nag po khyod
zhang chen nga dga' ston rten 'brel la yong ba'i nyi mo 'dir
'dre yi tho po khyod tshogs don gang yang med
nga yi lag tu khyer ba'i bla gri khra ldan 'di
mtho nam mkha' la 'phyar na
steng gdon gza' dang khyab 'jug gi gnod pa thub

⁷⁴ *Rigs sras de gnyis* refers to the bride and the groom.

⁷⁵ The 28th king of the Tubo (mTho bod) Dynasty.

*zhang chen nga yis dam 'dogs lan gsum byas pa dang
ji srid bar du lang chog mi yong zer*

May there be happiness!

You, black demon cairn at the left side of uncle

How can [you] be piled up by humans?

How can [you] be piled up by the gods?

You, the black demon cairn, piled up by demons

On this very day, I, uncle, have come to celebrate the wedding

There is no reason for you demon cairn to assemble [here]

This soul knife with a hawk carried in my hand

If brandished to the high sky

Can overcome the harm of evil spirits [from] above, Rahu ⁷⁶ and Vishnu

As long as I, uncle, have bound [you] three times in an oath and

It is said that you will not be allowed to stand up

After completing this speech, the uncle will turn over the black stone. In the meantime, the bride will dismount in front of the house. The uncle from the bride's side will present a ceremonial scarf and give a speech to the door before kicking it open, as usually the gate will not be opened until the uncle gives a speech to the door (from *Lha sa khul gyi gnyen sgrig lam srol*, p. 86):

*om swasti! bde legs su gyur cig
sgo mo 'di yi byung tshul shod zer na
mas them 'di ni mdzo mo shing las grub
mdzo mo shing 'di kha mdog legs
glang chen sa la nyal 'dra lta bu yin
'gyur ba med pa 'i ngang du bzhugs
Sgo 'di yi g.yas g.yon gnyis po la
sa rdo chu gsum gyi 'dres lhad med
chos byin can brgyad khri bzhi stong gis
sgo 'di yi g.yas g.yon bzhengs nas yod*

⁷⁶ In Tibetan folk belief, gZa' is a semi-god and he has numerous eyes all over his body.

skyes yag zhing gi a shing bzos nas yod
a shing yag la skyes lo bzang bar shog
sgo thod smug po mchong gi shing las grub
smug po mchong gi shing 'di kha mdog legs
de ring sgo mo phye ba'i skal bzang 'di
zhang chen nga yi dbang du babs nas yod

Om Swasti! May all wishes be fulfilled!
If I was to tell you the origin of the gate
The lower frame sill is made out of female tree
The female tree has a good colour
It looks like an elephant lying on the ground
May it remain unchangeable!
Two sides, the right and left, of the gate
Are made with pure earth, stone and water
The right and left side of the gate
Are made with the scriptures of 84,000 holy dharma
The bolt is made of good tree
May the bolt bring a good harvest [for the family]
The upper frame of the gate is made of the tree of jade (mchong)
The tree of jade is taking on a good colour
The auspicious ceremony of opening the gate today
Is the right and obligation of me, the great uncle

After his speech, the groom's family will ask this third greeting group welcome in their home, and when they enter the gate, the uncle sings (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 76):

g.yas de nas rtsa zhig bzas gcig gnyis gsum
g.yon de nas chu zhig 'thung bzhi lnga drug
rtsa chu 'dzoms po gnas bzod bde po
bya pho dkar po 'i sgo nga 'dra po
bya skad dang po sa la 'khyil song
sa yi bkra shis zhal gro

nor bu blangs nas phebs song
nor bu phebs dus sgo phye
mgron po phebs dus khyi bkag
lags zhus pa'i nam mkha'
nam mkha'
nam mkha' yi la bya zhig 'dug
bya de thang dkar rgod po red
sa gzhi 'di la mi zhig 'dug
mi pho bsod nams dbang 'dus red
lags gzhus pa'i kham s gsum dbang 'dus
g.yas la mda' mo btang nas bzhag yod
gcig gnyis gsum
g.yyon la gzhu mo bkug nas bzhag yod
bzhi lnga drug
mda' mo btang yod
bzhu mo bkug yod
tshe ring g.yang bzhag sgrig
sgrig pa'i thog la zhog

Have some grass from the right side – one, two, three
 Drink a little water from the left side – four, five, six
 I am happy with abundant water and grass
 Like an egg of a white rooster
 The bird's first crow echoed on the earth
 An auspicious person
 Brought the jewel
 Open the door when the jewel arrives
 Tie the dogs when the guest arrives
 Say: yes, sky
 Sky
 There is a bird in the sky
 It is a white vulture
 There is a man on the earth
 He is Sonam Wangdu

Say: yes, the conqueror of the three worlds
Shoot an arrow to the right
One, two, three
The bent bow is put to the left
Four, five, six
The arrow has been shot
The bow has been bent
Arrange the fortune meat (g.yang bzhang) ⁷⁷ for longevity
Come after arranging it!

As soon as boy's team arrives in the courtyard, the uncle sings again (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 76):

gzhi 'di rgyal po'i pho brang
zur lcog nyi shu rtsa lnga
phyong gzhi ga nas bltas kyang
bkra shis rtags brgyad tshang bzhang

At the base of the king's palace
There are twenty-five *zur lcog*⁷⁸
Even if one looks from the four directions
The eight auspicious signs⁷⁹ are completed

Then the uncle gives a speech to the water bucket (*chu ban*, a bucket for carrying water on the back) and to the dung (*lci ba*), which is placed in the centre of the courtyard. The speech to the dung is as follows (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 49):

bde legs su gyur cig
lci ba 'di yi byung tshul zhu dgos na
'brong pho brgya yi lci ba 'dug

⁷⁷ The same as *g.yang sha*, 'meat used in the *g.yang sgam* ("fortune box") for good luck'.

⁷⁸ *Zur lcog* is a small room built on the roof of the main house.

⁷⁹ The eight symbols of good fortune are always used in ceremonies such as weddings, daily worship and so on. They are the *gdugs* ('the parasol'), the *gser nya* ('the golden fish'), the *bum pa* ('the treasure vase'), the *padma* ('the lotus'), the *dung dkar* ('the right turning white conch'), the *dbal be'u* ('the endless knot') and the *rgyal mtshan* ('the victory banner')

'brong mo brgya yi lci ba 'dug
ma he dkar po brgya yi lci ba 'dug
g.yag gu rog po brgya yi lci ba 'dug
'dod 'jo'i ba mo brgya yi lci ba 'dug
lci ba 'di las 'dzoms pa med
'jig rten mi yi lto gos kyi bla yin

Let there be happiness!

If we are to talk about the origin of this dung
 There is dung of a hundred wild male yaks
 [And] dung of a hundred wild female yaks
 [And] dung of a hundred white buffaloes
 [And] dung of a hundred black yaks
 And dung of a hundred milk cows
 There is nothing more abundant than this dung
 It is the soul of people's wealth

Before they enter the main hall where the wedding ceremony takes place, the uncle will give a speech to the ladder that the bride will walk past. In Tibetan farm houses, the staircase between the floors consisted of a ladder made of a notched tree-trunk⁸⁰ (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 54):

bde legs su gyur cig
dma' sa mtho la 'dzegs pa'i bkra shis pa'i mgron skas 'di
ru g.yas pa 'di tsan dan shing las grub
tsan dan shing 'di dri mchog zhim
ru g.yon ma 'di lha shing shug pa las grub
lha shing shug pa dmar mdangs che
dbyar dgun med pa 'gyur ba med
gdang bu 'di dam chos dpung sgril 'dra
nam mkha'i skar tshogs lta bu'i 'gyur ba med

⁸⁰ For a photo, see Stein [1962] 1972, facing p. 96.

phyag 'ju 'di ma gzhog gru bzhi 'dra
zhang chen ngas gdang bu dang po dga' la 'dzegs
nor bu 'di skyid la gdan 'dren zhus
skas 'dzegs 'di la 'dzegs pa la
blo stobs che ba'i pho gsar dgos
yid du 'ong ba'i mdzes ma dgos
shags gzhas mkhas pa'i zhang chen dgos
de ring nga yi lag tu khyer ba'i mjal dar lho sprin khyug pa 'di bkra shis pa'i mgon
skas 'di la 'bul lo

Let there be happiness!

This auspicious ladder ascending from the low place to the upper

The frame on the right side is made of sandalwood

This sandalwood with excellent fragrance

The frame on the left is made of divine juniper

The divine juniper with great brightness

It does not change [its colour], whether it is winter or summer

The rungs look like stacks of scriptures of the holy dharma

Everlasting like stars in the sky

The handle resembles a square shape

I, the great uncle, happily step on the first rung

[I] happily invite the jewel to happiness

To step on this ladder

A courageous young man is needed

A beautiful girl is needed

A great uncle, master of humorous singing, is needed

Today, I'm offering from my hand this ceremonial scarf, which is like the floating southern clouds, to this auspicious ladder

In the living room, all the preparations are finished, various kinds of food have been prepared (*gro so phyé mar, gro ma 'bras sil*) and different kinds of fruits have been placed on the cabinet. Various kinds of food, drinks, a sheep's head and objects for good luck have been placed on the table in front on the cabinet. Wheat, barley, rice, silk cloth, clothes and tea

bricks from the bride's family have been placed on another table. The pillars of the house have been decorated with a host of ceremonial scarves.

A dais for the bride and the groom has been put up in the middle of the room and it is covered with the best woven carpet. On the carpet are some barley grains made in the shape of the propitious swastika (*g.yung drung*) in order to symbolise permanence.

Before the grand wedding ceremony starts, the roof ceremony (*thog gsol*) is held on the rooftop; if the time of the year does not allow this, it can be held in the courtyard. Tibetans believe that, in Tibet, the deities of a family often dwell on the rooftop and ensure peace and health for the family. They also block the intrusion of demons and evil spirits. So, on the first day or third day of the Tibetan New Year, and at the wedding ceremony, streamers with printed mantras will be erected on the rooftop of the house; the family also burns incense as an offering on the rooftop, and a short ceremony is held there in order to pray for the protection of the family.

Thus, the wedding formally begins, the bride and groom will take the central seats at a table, and around them will be their parents, the ceremonial master, the ceremonial servants, the uncle and his servant(s), bridesmaids and relatives. The ceremonial master stands up from his seat holding the ceremonial scarf that will first of all be offered at the house altar, and then he will turn around to face the pillars and give a speech (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 57):

sa gzhi pad ma steng du
Ka smad rin chen rdo la dkrug
'gyur ba'i dogs pa nga la med
Ka ba 'di la ka rab bcu gsum gnas
Ka ba tsan dan sdong po zur brgyad
Ka mgo pad ma'i brtsegs dang bcas tshang yod
Gzhu⁸¹ yas gzhu gdung a ka ru
'di la mdzes pa'i tshon gyi bkrag
Nor gzhong kham bu bcas pa'i gser nya kha sprod

⁸¹ The plank of wood between the pillar and the beam, see Goldstein 2001: 943.

Gdung la gdung khebs 'ja' tshon sna lnga yod
Gdung ma 'phred nyal brgyab pa de
Gas chag med pa'i ngang du bzhugs
Lcam dang dral ma bu phrug 'dzoms pa 'dra
Sngar yang 'dzoms la da yang 'dzoms
Nga yi lag tu khyer ba'i mjal dar 'di rta mgo me 'bar gyi steng du bsgron rgyu

On the lotus-like earth
the base of the pillar is made of precious stone
I do not worry that it will change
This pillar has thirteen layers
This sandalwood pillar with eight angles
The top of the pillar is completed with layers of lotus [petals]
The planks and beams are made of eaglewood⁸²
And beautifully painted with colours
There are golden fish facing each other along with treasure plates with peaches
The cover of the beams has the five colours of the rainbow
The beams lie horizontally [on the pillars]
Remaining there without cracks
The small beams and wood pieces [on top] are like groups of children
May they always gather as they did before!
I will offer this ceremonial scarf in my hand to the blazing horse head

Then the ceremonial master offers a speech to the father (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 58):

Yab chen khyed ni ri rgyal lhun po 'dra
'gyur ba med pa gtan du bzhugs
Bkra shis pa'i mgul dar 'di phul lo

You, Great Father, are like Mt. Sumeru
Remaining forever without changing [in character]

⁸² A kind of wood, see Goldstein 2001: 1187.

I offered you this auspicious ceremonial scarf

Afterwards the ceremonial master offers a speech to the mother (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 59):

*yum chen khyed ni ma pham g.yu mtsho 'dra
ma pham g.yu mtsho pad ma 'i 'dab sdong rgyas
'dab rgyas zhal kha phye nas lha sras 'khrungs
mjal dar nang mdzod dgu brtsegs 'di 'bul lo*

You, Great Mother, are like Manasarovar Lake
The thousand petals of the lotus of Manasarovar Lake
Having blossomed, a noble son was born
I offered you this nine-layered ceremonial scarf⁸³

Then a speech is offered to the groom (from *dBus gtsang khul gyi bag ston goms srol*, p. 59):

*lha sras khyed ni ljon pa 'i sras po 'dra
pho rgod brgya yi khyu rgyan yin
dpa' bo stong gi srog dar yin
rgya dar dri med rab dkar 'di
phyi la bkra shis rtags brgyad tshang nas yod
nang du g.yu 'brug tshang nyal yod
mtho nam mkha' la 'phyar tsa na
nam mkha' 'ja' yis khengs pa 'i rten 'brel yod
dma' sa gzhi ma la 'phyar tsa na
sa gzhi nor gyi khengs pa 'i rten 'brel yod
bar bzhugs gral ma la 'phyar tsa na
bzhugs gral 'od kyis khengs pa 'i rten 'brel yod
rgya dar dri med rab dkar 'di
lha sras khyed la bsgron rgyu yin*

⁸³ *Nang mdzod dgu brtsegs* is the name of a type of ceremonial scarf.

You, Noble Son, are like a heavenly son
You are an ornament of hundreds of brave men
And the life-force flag of a thousand heroes
On this white, stainless Chinese silk scarf
The eight auspicious signs are complete on its edges
In the centre a turquoise dragon is lying
If it is waved high above in the sky
Is a good sign that the sky is filled with rainbows
If it is waved to the earth below
Is a good sign that the earth will have abundant wealth
If it is waved on the row in the middle
Is a good sign that the seating row will be filled with light
[I] will offer this white, stainless Chinese silk scarf
To you, Noble Son

At the end, the maternal uncle will present ceremonial scarves to the ceremonial master, his servants and the beer girls, and then return to his seat. The newlyweds will receive good wishes, ceremonial scarves and other gifts from their relatives, friends and neighbours. Wedding gifts are offered according to the givers' financial situation. Usual wedding gifts include barley beer, butter, packs of tea, mutton (a whole sheep stuffed with one to two kilograms of wool), a bag of barley, a bag of wheat, money and clothes.

The host asks all the guests to sit in the room and courtyard, where they prepare sumptuous food, tea and beer for the guests; the wedding banquet includes both lunch and dinner. Compared with rural areas, urban families hold wedding feasts as large as they can afford, yet this tradition has probably been very well kept in the countryside. In the western part of Tibet, some villagers may use up to seven continuous days to entertain the relatives during a wedding, but in urban areas, like Lhasa, the ceremony just takes two or three days. In the town a wedding banquet becomes quite businesslike, with people hold a wedding feast in order to return gifts and money to their relatives, in order to pay back friends' kindness and money. Traditionally, during the ceremony, many wedding songs will be sung.

After the Wedding Day

A few days after the wedding, the bride is expected to return to her family, with the bride and her husband brings gifts to the family; they may even stay for a couple of days or even longer (*gnyen 'phrad or skyo log*). Some regional customs require that the bride should wait to visit her family till six months have elapsed. According to tradition, the girl's family will also return gifts to the boy's family as a courtesy.

Conclusion

In contemporary Tibet traditional marriage customs, including speech and song traditions, are rapidly disappearing, particularly in the cities. Oral traditions of a society are vital parts of a people's culture and contribute to their identity, and it is crucial at present for Tibetans to keep their cultural heritage. Tibetan marriage songs are not well known in the West, and my primary goal in this thesis has been to make available in English a number of Tibetan marriage songs, as well as some speeches. In the thesis I write about the marriage songs as a genre, and I have shown what songs are sung during the different parts of the wedding ceremony. I have also described the different stages of the Tibetan marriage, such as spouse selection, the beer-asking ceremony, the wedding contract, the wedding preparations and the actual wedding ceremony. I have also described the different roles of the ceremonial master, the maternal uncle, the beer maidens as well as other roles connected with the marriage ceremony. It is my hope that my modest contribution will make Tibetan oral song traditions better known.

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Marriage Customs in Central Tibet

(Abstract)

2008

Tenzin

My thesis focuses on Tibetan marriage, the courtship, the marriage ceremony and particularly the songs sung during the initial stages of a marriage and during the actual marriage ceremony. Since Tibet weddings in general and different forms of marriage in particular (such as polygamy), have already been studied by some scholars, I focus on the marriage ceremonies typical in villages in Central Tibet, and particularly I have studied the songs. Only a few scholars have collected marriage songs from Central Tibet, and these songs are rapidly disappearing due to modernization. The main research questions I ask in my thesis are: In what ways have marriage in the Central Tibetan countryside traditionally been arranged? How does the selection of spouses proceed? How are engagement ceremonies and marriage ceremonies carried out? The emphasis, however, is on the speeches, songs and dances carried out during different parts of the wedding proceedings. I mainly portray wedding customs in the Central Tibet. I describe stages of courtship, the engagement, the roles of the matchmaker and the maternal uncle and describe the wedding day, the songs and speeches given, the sending and receiving of the bride, and the wedding ceremony. Since I'm particularly interested in the songs and speeches, I have selected a number of them from textual sources, and these I translate and annotate.

In my thesis, Part 1, I introduce my work by giving general information about Tibetan marriage. I write about the primary and secondary sources in Tibetan and in other languages, I state the principal objectives of the study, and the research methods. In Part 2, I write about the genre of marriage songs. Part 3 deals with spouse selection, astrological calculation, arranged marriages and divorce. In Part 4, I write about engagement, the beer-asking day, the wedding contract, the wedding preparations, the wedding day and bringing the bride home, the sending-off ceremony and the three greetings, and how weddings are dissolved. After each section I introduce speeches and songs that belong to the section of the marriage that I describe. The songs are given in transliteration (the Wylie system), followed by a translation into English. The songs contain many references to Buddhism, to different countries, to ancient Tibetan myths and to nature. There are also many local terms difficult to find in any dictionary. Wherever necessary I add notes in the translation in order to explain the references and the content of the songs.

